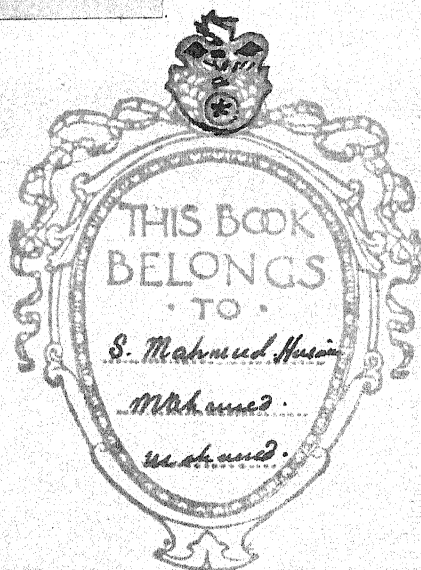


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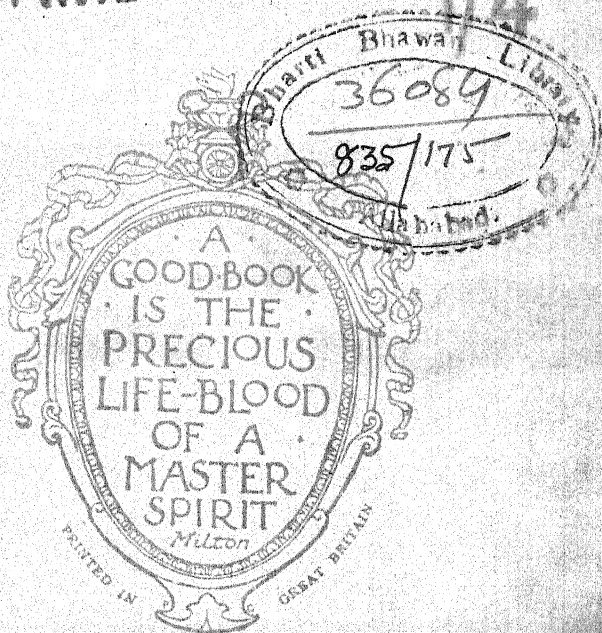
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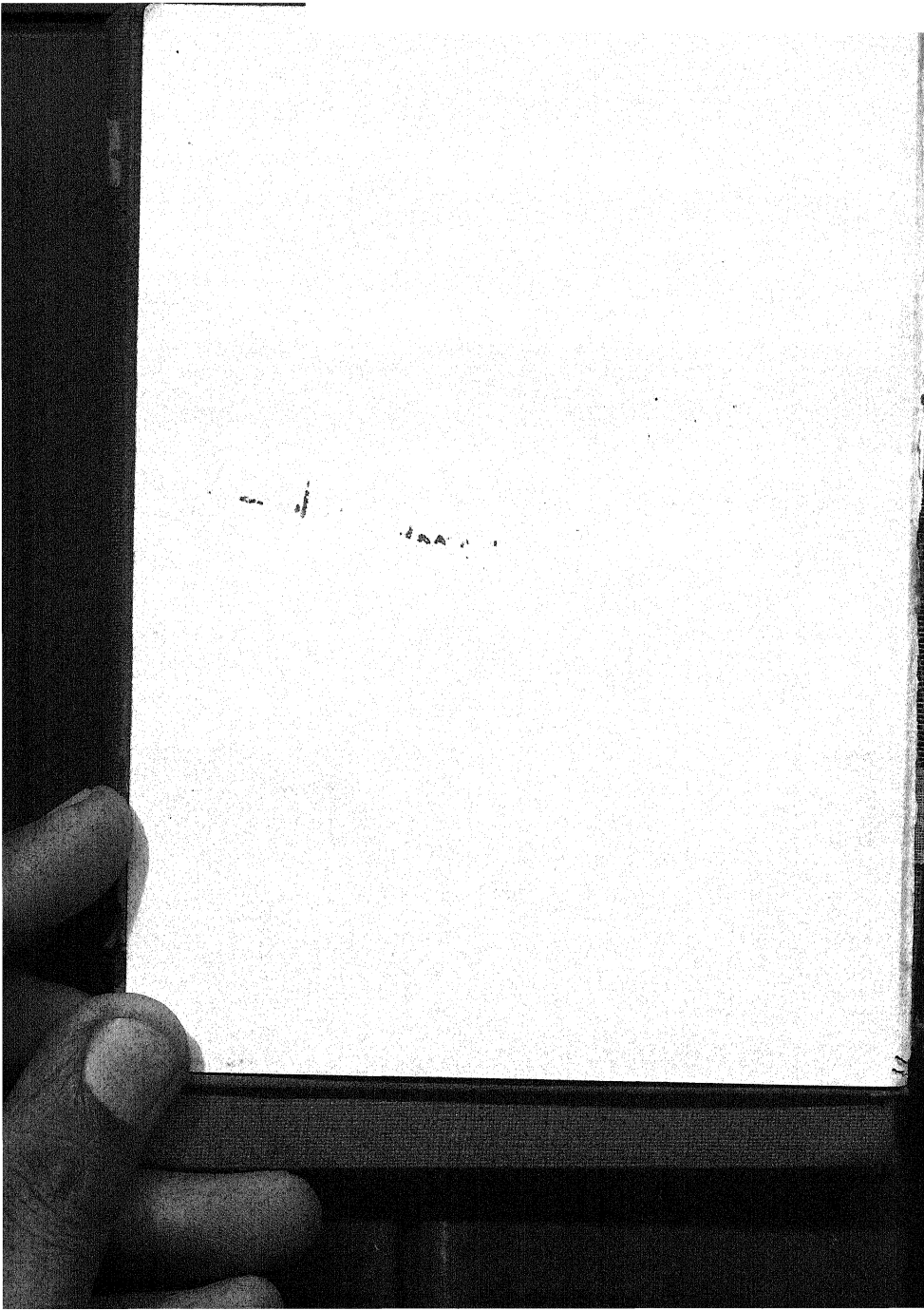


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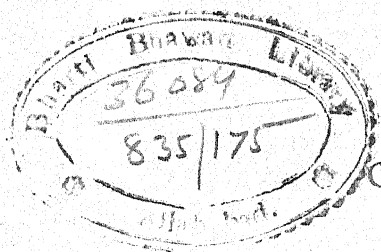


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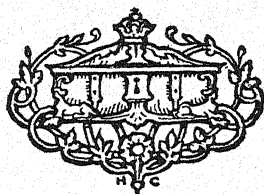
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From the Bronze Bust at Naples

DANTE

# STORIES FROM DANTE



BY  
E.H. BIGG WITHER



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## INTRODUCTION

### I. DANTE ALIGHIERI AND THE 'DIVINE COMEDY'

THE stories in this book are taken from the *Divina Commedia*, the great poem by Dante Alighieri, Italy's national poet. Many parts of the original poem are extremely difficult, and it contains so many references to events and people well known at the time, but not familiar to modern readers, that these stories can only give a very brief and simplified introduction to the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante was born in Florence in 1265, and he lived through a most turbulent period of Italy's history. We do not know very much about his childhood or early manhood, and some of the stories connected with him are probably only legend. But he tells us himself that when he was nine years old a deep impression was made on him by his first meeting with a girl of the neighbourhood, who was his own age, and with whom he later fell in love. It is not quite certain who this girl was, and some scholars have even thought that she was not a real person at all, but an ideal figure from Dante's imagination. She is generally supposed to have been Beatrice Portinari, daughter of a wealthy neighbour of Dante's family; but it does

not matter very much, because Dante tells us all we need to know about her, and always refers to her simply as 'Beatrice.'

When he was eighteen years old he met her again, and fell completely under her spell. It was no ordinary courtship—his family had perhaps already arranged a marriage for him with another woman. But although Dante probably never saw very much of Beatrice she influenced his whole life, and became for him a high ideal of womanhood, a symbol of all that was noblest and best in humankind. His devotion to her was in accordance with medieval fashions of chivalry, by which a knight dedicated his life to the service of one lady, and performed brave deeds in her honour. But for Dante, Beatrice was much more than a liege lady; as he grew older she came to be his ideal of perfect virtue, and he believed that only by living as he thought she would wish him to live could he hope to be one day fit for Paradise.

In 1290, when she was twenty-five, Beatrice died, and Dante tells us that he had a terrible dream, in which he was forewarned of her death. But although he lived for many years longer, his devotion to her memory increased with time, and she became for him something very like a guardian angel and, as we can see from the *Divine Comedy*, he thought of her as placed among the saints in glory, very near to God.

Dante's youth, as far as we know about it, was probably typical of the life of a well-born young man of his day. He must have gone out on hunting and shooting expeditions into the country round about Florence, danced with the Florentine maidens, and gone to the springtime festivals. Some military exercises would have been required of him, and we know that he began to write poetry when he was scarcely more than a boy.

He was twenty-five when Beatrice died, and in this terrible sorrow he turned for comfort to study, and read and thought deeply. Not long after this he began to concern himself with the politics of his native city. If you read the section called 'Florence in Dante's Time' you will see that the citizens of Florence were divided into factions—nowadays we should call them political parties. The struggle between these factions was very bitter, and presently Dante came to hold an important position among those men who were called the 'White Guelphs.' He was very active in their cause, and earned the enmity of the opposing party, the 'Black Guelphs,' so that in 1302, when the Blacks came into power in Florence, he was summoned to appear before them on a trumped-up charge. At the time he was probably absent on a political mission to Rome, and could not possibly come to answer the charge, so very shortly afterwards he

was condemned to die if he should ever return to Florence.

So his exile began, and he spent the rest of his life wandering about from place to place, and staying as a guest in the palaces of noble lords in many parts of Italy. He never saw his beloved Florence again, for he remained an exile until his death in Ravenna in 1321.

We can imagine how hard this homeless wandering life must have seemed to a man as proud and independent in spirit as Dante was, and there are many passages in his great poem which show us how bitterly he felt his exile's position. Especially in the episode when he meets his ancestor Cacciaguida in Paradise can we see how much he loved his native city, and when wrong is done to a great love it often expresses itself in bitterness. So we find Dante calling down stern curses upon the Florentine citizens who had wrongfully condemned him to exile, and who had made the fair and peaceful Florence into a faction-ridden, unworthy city, where injustice ruled, and every man suspected his neighbour.

Dante began to write when he was a young man, and much of his prose and verse has come down to us, but his fame rests chiefly on the *Divine Comedy*. When we have read the poem the title may seem strange to us, but we must remember that in Dante's day a work was often called a comedy if it had a



'happy ending,' even when there was much tragedy in it.

It is not quite certain when he began it, but probably the whole was written during the period of his exile. It is the story of Dante's own journey through Hell and Purgatory, where he is led by the Roman poet Virgil, and up through the realms of Heaven, where Beatrice is his guide. As he goes he meets and talks with many spirits of the dead, some who were his personal friends on earth, and others who were great figures of history or legend.

The journey was, of course, imaginary, but Dante did not write simply to tell a tale. We can look upon it as a vision, and Dante tells us that his purpose in writing it down was 'to remove those living in this life from their state of misery' (that is, of sin), 'and to lead them to a state of felicity' (that is, of virtue and happiness). The poem, therefore, can be read in at least two ways: first, for the story it tells of a medieval Florentine poet visiting 'those regions which are eternal'; and secondly, as an allegory, in which Dante represents mankind as a whole led by Reason (Virgil) to see the vileness of sin and its just punishments, and to reach life at its highest in this world (in the Earthly Paradise). Man can go no further without God's especial grace, so Beatrice (Divine Revelation, God's Grace) comes as a guide to the true Paradise.

There was a time in Dante's life, before he left Florence, about which we do not know very much, except that he neglected the memory of Beatrice, his true inspiration, and lived unworthily. He is referring to this period when he says that he was 'lost in a dark wood,' for the wood represents a state of sin and sorrow, and he is rescued from it by going on the journey which the *Divine Comedy* narrates. In the same way an allegorical value can be given to nearly all those whom Dante meets as he goes, except the spirits of the dead; but at first it is quite enough to read the poem for its story alone.

Dante lived before the discoveries of Christopher Columbus, and for him the known world covered scarcely half the globe. He thought that the southern half of the earth was entirely sea, and he placed the Mountain of Purgatory in the middle of this vast unknown ocean, at a point opposite to the Holy City of Jerusalem. So in his vision Dante goes down into the Inferno, which he describes as an inverted cone-shaped abyss, extending deep into the earth below the inhabited world. With Virgil he climbs down to the bottom of this abyss, where he finds Lucifer. Then he and Virgil pass through the centre of the globe, and come out on the other side, on the shores of the Mount of Purgatory.

To Dante our world was the fixed centre of the

universe, and he describes Heaven as nine moving spheres which revolve round it, each enclosing the sphere next smallest to itself. Then, around and above all, is the Empyrean, or true Paradise, which is not in space.

Dante tells us nothing of his return to earth, but we are to imagine that when he has been permitted the vision of the Trinity with which his great poem closes, he returns and lives the life of a normal man, writing down what he has seen so that other men might learn from it to lead a better life, and thus to win a place in Paradise. Many tales are told of Dante's later life, when his writings had made him famous. It is said that, as he passed through the fields, peasants would point him out to their children, saying: 'That is the man who has been down into Hell. See its smoke upon his face!' And the *Divine Comedy* is still the greatest poem in the Italian language; children learn parts of it in schools, and the most learned scholars study it and love it.

Dante has often been called the father of Italian literature, not only because he is the greatest of Italian poets, but also because the *Divine Comedy* was the first great poem which was written in the Italian language. Before Dante was born, Italian literature scarcely existed. All educated men knew Latin, and although the different Italian dialects were used

for the ordinary intercourse of daily life, Latin was regarded as the language for all important occasions, and Italian was scarcely considered worthy to be used for literature.

But early in the thirteenth century a group of poets in the south of the country had begun to write in Italian, and by degrees men were realizing that the dialects they spoke in their homes could also be used for literary purposes. But still writers were only experimenting; they were accustomed to speaking Italian, but at first they found it difficult to write it. And there remained a widespread feeling that Italian was unimportant when compared to Latin; that one was a language for use in the home, by uneducated people and by women and children, while the other was a noble tongue, fit for church ceremonies, palaces, and courts of justice. A really great Italian work was needed to convince people in general that Italian was a language in which fine works of literature could be written. It was Dante who, with his *Divine Comedy*, raised Italian to the level of a true language. So it is important to realize that Italian literature really began with Dante, and this makes his poetic achievement all the more remarkable.

It is as well to remember that Dante's judgments of the spirits whom he meets are his own judgments, and men of his time would not necessarily have agreed with

them. He is stern and unfaltering in his condemnation of all sin, but he shows courage and fairness. For example, he is bold enough to give more than one pope a place in the *Inferno*, but he does not hesitate to condemn his dearest friends to eternal punishment, when justice seems to require it. He scourges his own sins most bitterly, and although he is to gain a place in Heaven, he makes it quite clear that this is by the mercy and goodness of God rather than by his own merit.

The whole of medieval Catholic life and thought is in the *Divine Comedy*, and although we must remember that the original is a poem of the highest beauty, which no translation can represent, it contains so many interesting and vivid stories, and so many illustrations of the way in which men of Dante's time lived and thought, that to read even a translation can give an excellent idea of life in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. These stories only attempt to give a bare outline of the poem.

## II. FLORENCE IN DANTE'S TIME

When we think about Dante's Italy we must remember that it was not a single country ruled over by one king, as Italy is to-day. What we now know as the Kingdom of Italy was then divided up into



many states of different sizes; and although most of them acknowledged the sovereignty of the Holy Roman Empire, they were in fact more or less independent. Many of them were self-governing communities, or 'city states,' and at first their territory was little larger than the township from which they took their name. Most of the country districts were in the power of feudal overlords, and the city states had freed themselves little by little from these noblemen. There was constant rivalry and hostility between the communes; some became wealthy through commerce, because of their position on a navigable river or main highway; some were swallowed up by their stronger neighbours; and some prospered and grew in size by winning territory from the feudal aristocracy.

But quarrels and fighting took place not only outside the communes. By the middle of the thirteenth century dissension within the cities themselves had grown to such a pitch that a peaceful, well-ordered life was almost impossible, and in each town some of the flower of Italian manhood perished, slain either in private feuds or in fighting against the cities' foes. There was rivalry and hostility between powerful families in the same town; the wealthy merchant class was rising in importance, and the old aristocracy resented its influence in the government of the city.

But the great division which affected the whole of Italy was the hostility between Pope and Emperor; for in those days the popes were not content to be spiritual overlords alone; they also claimed worldly sovereignty, took part in the political struggles of Europe, and had soldiers to fight their battles. The territory over which the Emperor ruled was vast, and the Pope's interests were constantly conflicting with his, and by alliance or diplomatic arrangement most of the princes in Europe supported one side or the other.

The struggle was especially fierce in Italy, where those who supported the imperial interests were called Ghibellines, and to this party most of the old aristocracy belonged, while the wealthy burghers and merchants tended to favour the Pope's interests, and these men were called Guelphs. Each side made alliances with other powerful European princes, and many fierce and bloody battles were fought; while even in the smallest Italian communes the citizens were divided into those who favoured Pope and those who favoured Emperor.

Of all the city states in medieval Italy the Republic of Florence was perhaps the most typical. By tradition Florence was a Guelph city, supporting the papal cause, but she had her Ghibellines also, and sometimes they won over the reins of government. It was during one of these intervals of Ghibelline power that Dante

was born; but in 1266, the year after his birth, they were expelled from Florence, and the Guelphs returned. But this did not make for peace, because the Guelphs themselves split into two factions, calling themselves Blacks and Whites, and they fought and quarrelled more bitterly than ever.

After 1282 the government of the city of Florence was chiefly in the hands of the 'Arti'—the guilds or societies of tradesmen and merchants—in addition to which there were certain officers who were elected to represent other interests or to enforce justice. Florence had become a wealthy city, her merchants and bankers were known the world over; and as trade and profits increased, life in the city grew less simple: strange foreign customs and fashions were to be seen; in certain quarters money was poured out lavishly on vain and luxurious living, and this thirst for getting and spending money seemed to coincide with the ever-growing strife and unrest among the citizens.

The Black Guelphs were those who wished to upset the ancient method of government and bring Florence directly under the power of the Pope: while the Whites, although they supported papal interests, wished to keep the city's independence, and to struggle against foreign influences. It was to this last party that Dante belonged, and in reading his conversation with his ancestor Cacciaguida in the *Divine Comedy* we see well

what he thought of the change in the spirit and mode of life of the Florentine citizens.

In 1294 Boniface VIII was elected Pope, and Boniface was a man ambitious for power, and eager to gain control of the Florentine republic—by force, if need be. The Black Guelphs supported his aims, while the Whites struggled fiercely to maintain their independence. Plot followed plot, and at last fighting broke out within the city. Plunders and massacres took place, and finally, by treacherous help from outside, the Blacks won power and the Whites were expelled.

Among the others Dante was condemned to exile, and it is to these turbulent times that he refers so often in the *Divine Comedy*, when he bitterly laments the quarrels and factions in his native city.

During the long years of his exile Dante's horizons widened, and he learnt that it was not in Florence alone that trouble and bloodshed prevailed. So, little by little, he came to think that very many of the sorrows of Italy were caused by the greed of the popes and high dignitaries of the Catholic Church, who should not, he thought, desire land or worldly power, but should leave politics to other men, and concern themselves wholly with things of the spirit. This is the explanation of the bitter curses Dante calls down upon the corruption of the Church. The

interests of Pope and Emperor were different, he thought, and the Pope should not be a great prince ruling over much territory, but the Vicar of God, with power over men's souls: while priests and monks should lay aside their greed for gold, and copy St. Francis, who humbly followed the Lady Poverty.

Dante looked back with love and longing to the Florence of old, small in size, and girdled with her city walls, whose inhabitants lived simply and nobly, at peace with one another. But it was a vain ideal: turbulent times had come, and Florence was never again to be the little city 'living in peace, sober and chaste,' which Cacciaguida had known.

E. H. B. W.

1936.



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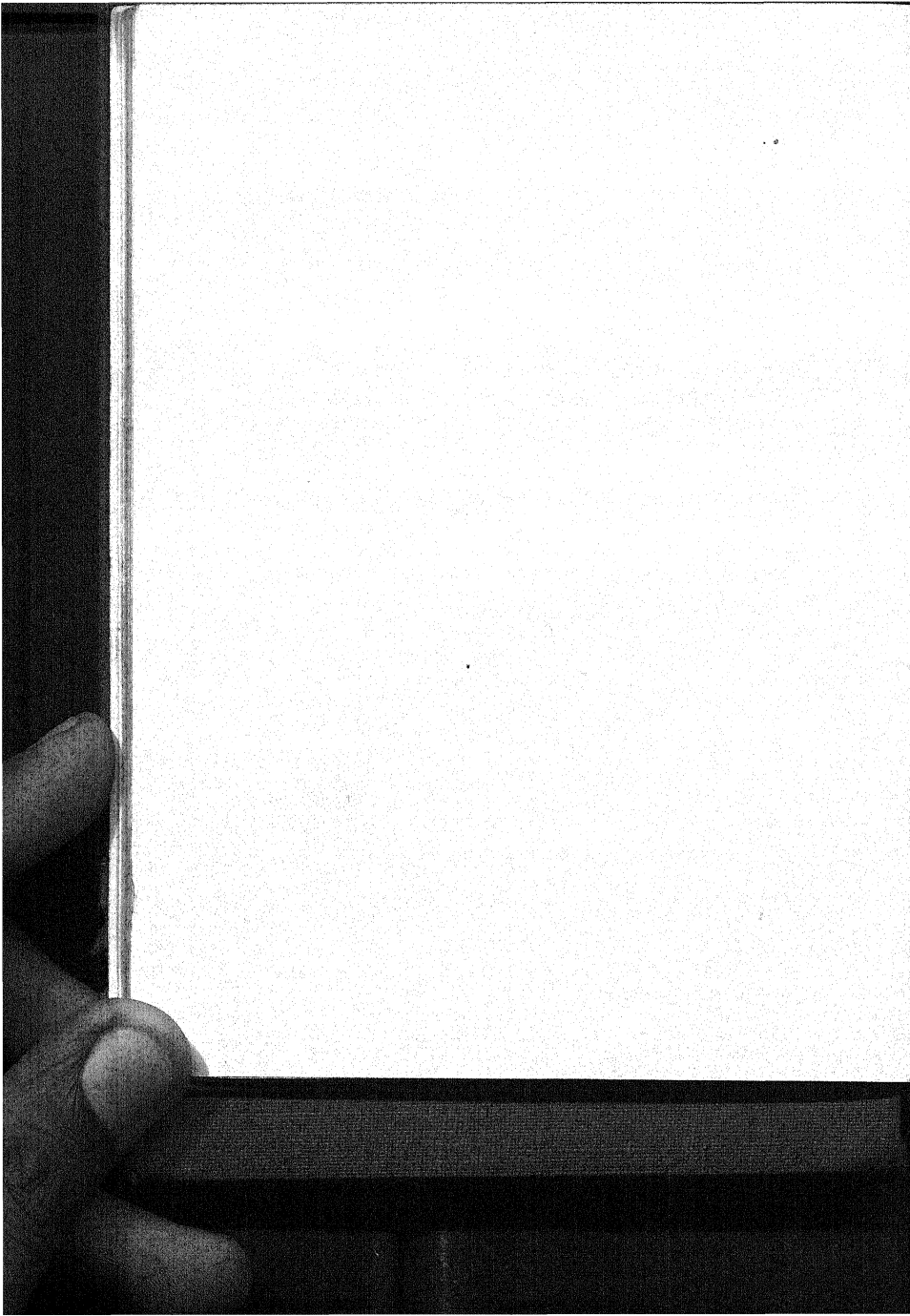
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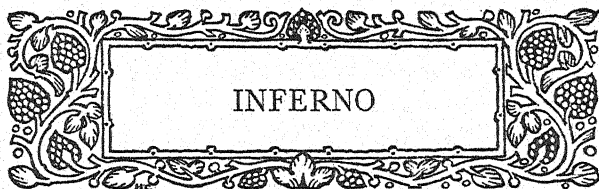
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INFERNO







DANTE IS LOST IN A DARK WOOD, AND VIRGIL  
RESCUES HIM FROM IT

THE Florentine poet Dante had reached the age of five-and-thirty years, when he found himself utterly lost in a dark wood. It was night-time, and there seemed to be no way out of the wood, which was wild and rough and lonely, so that Dante was oppressed with fear, and almost despaired, the more so since he could not well remember how he had come to enter it.

But at last, after much wandering, he came out at the foot of a hill and, looking up, he saw the sun's rays beginning to gild its summit. So then his fear was made less, and he flung himself down to rest and gazed backwards on the wood, which was still deep in shadow. After he had rested a little he began to climb upwards, but had not gone far when a spotted leopard appeared and began to hinder his path, so that again Dante was afraid, lest he should be denied this fair way out of his sorrow.

But it was morning, and springtime, so that he did not altogether despair, and was proceeding onwards when suddenly two more animals came towards him: a lion, which seemed raging with hunger and about to

spring, and a lean and savage wolf. The wolf particularly filled Dante with fear, and took from him all hope of mounting the hill, for she rushed after him, and forced him back little by little, till his descent became a race downwards, and terror again oppressed him as he approached once more the dark and gloomy wood in the valley.

But suddenly, as Dante fled, he saw a dim shape before him, and he called out for help:

'Whether you are man or phantom, have pity on me in my distress!'

He was answered: 'Once I was a man—I was born in Mantua, and lived in Rome under the good Augustus, at the time of the false and lying gods. I was the poet Virgil, and I sang of the good Aeneas, who came from Troy after that proud city was burned. But why do you rush downwards to sorrow? Why do you not climb the fair and sunlit mountain?'

Dante stood before the shape with reverence and delight.

'Are you indeed Virgil, the glory and the light of other poets?' he said. 'Ever have you been my master and much have I studied your writings—may my love for you now avail me! O wise one, help me to escape from this foul beast which fills me with terror, and which will not let me mount the hill.'

Virgil answered him: 'To escape from this savage and sorrowful place you must take another road. That vile wolf will let no man pass her; many has she slain, and will slay many more before the world is

freed from her. Therefore I think that the best way for your safety is to follow me. I will be your guide through regions which are eternal. First we will pass through a place of infinite sorrow, where many spirits suffer ceaseless torment and cry aloud to be released from it. Then shall you see a place where those who suffer are contented in their pain, for they know that at last they will take their seats among the blessed. Then, if you so desire, you shall mount to visit the realm of perfect joy and peace; and for that city you shall have a worthier guide, for I am not permitted to enter it.'

Dante answered him joyfully: 'Poet, by that God whom you never knew, I beseech you to be my guide on such a journey, and to lead me through the regions of sorrow to the gate of St. Peter, so that I may escape from this evil place, and perchance others also!'

So the two poets set out on their long journey, Virgil leading the way, and Dante behind him. As they went the twilight began to fall, and Dante, thinking of the toils of the journey before him, became troubled in his mind, and turned to Virgil for reassurance.

'Poet, you who are my guide,' he said, 'are you indeed sure that I am worthy to enter the immortal world while I am yet alive? Few living men have undertaken such a journey. You have written that Aeneas went thither, but from him sprang the seed of mighty Rome; and Paul the Apostle also went, but he was the Chosen of God. I am neither Aeneas nor

Paul, and I have no merit in me to deserve the journey—may it not be that I am foolish to undertake it?’

Virgil answered him a little sternly: ‘If I understand you well, your soul is oppressed with cowardice, that vileness of spirit which often hinders a man from honourable enterprise. To free you from fear, I will tell you the reason of my coming. I was among the souls in Limbo, who wait eternally yet have no hope, when a blessed lady called me. Her eyes shone brighter than the stars, and her voice was sweet and gentle as she spoke. “O courteous Mantuan spirit, whose fame still lasts in the world,” she said, “I am Beatrice, and love moves me to speak to you and ask your aid. I come from a high place whither I long to return, but there is a friend of mine still in his mortal form, who is so lost and fearful in a desolate spot that he needs help to escape from it. There is a noble lady in Heaven who sent me word of his plight: he loved me greatly, and I weep to see him so afflicted. Therefore, since it is thus willed on high, hasten, Virgil, and bear him comfort and aid!”’

‘When she had spoken thus to me, I came to you and took you from the power of that savage beast which was hindering you from climbing the fair mountain. So why do you fear? This journey is assigned to you in the court of Heaven, and naught can hinder it but your own cowardice. Since such a lady watches over you, you should be filled with courage and freedom of spirit!’

The chill of night makes the small flowers bend and

close, but at morning when the sun shines upon them, they open and stand erect. Thus did Dante at Virgil's words—all fear left him, his courage returned, and, like a prisoner set free, he said:

'Now indeed am I brave and willing, and much thanks do I give for Beatrice's pity and your courtesy. Now we two have but one desire—lead on, for I would go; you are my guide, my lord, and my master.'

So once more the two set out and began the long and arduous journey through Hell's abyss, up the Mountain of Purgatory, and into the Spheres of Paradise.

#### DANTE CROSSES THE RIVER ACHERON AND REACHES LIMBO

When the two poets had gone a little on their way they saw a great gate before them, and over the gate these words were written:

'I am the way into the sorrowful city, into the everlasting pain; I lead to the country of the lost people. Power, Wisdom, and Love made me, Justice moved my great Maker. None but eternal things were made before me, and I stand eternally. Abandon hope, all ye that enter here!'

Dante stood awhile and gazed at the inscription, and then turned to Virgil, saying:

'Master, these words are hard and fearful to me!'

Virgil, who knew the road they had to take, answered him:

'Here is no place for fear. Gird yourself rather with courage, for we have come to that place whose sorrowful inhabitants are for ever without wisdom and understanding.'

Then he took Dante's hand, and encouraged him, and led him through the gate to the hidden world within.

There all the air was dim around him, yet sighs and tears and deep wailings sounded through the starless dark; sorrow and strange cries were heard, and sounds of blows and strife.

'Master, what is this that I hear?' said Dante, who had stood for a while in horror. 'And who are these people who seem so overwhelmed with sorrow?' Virgil answered him: 'These are the wretched band of those whose blind life was so low that they neither sinned nor were virtuous. Heaven scorns them, deepest Hell will have none of them, and on earth all report of them is dead—indeed they never truly lived. Let us not waste our words upon them, but look and pass on.'

Then Dante gazed before him, and saw many people on the banks of a great river; and as he watched, more and more gathered, and all seemed eager to cross over. He and Virgil approached, joining the band and also waiting, until a boat came over the water towards them. The boatman was a hoary old man, fierce of aspect, with hairy cheeks and a long white beard, and he seemed to have glowing wheels of flame round his eyes.



As he approached he shouted:

'Woe to you, evil spirits! Never hope to see Heaven; I come to take you to the other shore, into eternal shadow, into fire and ice. And you there who are yet living—depart from those who are dead!'

These last words he addressed to Dante, but Virgil called out to him and said: 'Peace, Charon! His presence is willed by One whose will is law.' Then he turned to Dante. 'This great river is Acheron, and hither come all those from every land who die in the wrath of God. All these must pass over, but no virtuous soul crosses thus.'

So Dante watched the spirits filling the boat. All pressed forward to enter it, and fierce Charon with the glowing eyes beckoned them, smiting all lingerers with his oar. The weary spirits entered the boat, weeping bitterly and cursing their unhappy lot, and no sooner had it cast off from the shore, speeding over the dark water, than a fresh crowd of spirits began to gather on the bank.

But Dante did not enter the boat, and, as he watched, the earth shook most violently and gave forth a tumult of wind and a crimson flash, which deprived him of his senses, so that he fell, as a man falls who is overcome by sleep.

After a while his sleep was broken by a loud crash of thunder, and he started up and looked around him. Then he saw that he was no longer by the shores of Acheron, but on the edge of the dread Valley of the Abyss, which encloses all the sins of past ages. It was

so dark and deep and cloudy that Dante, looking down, could see nothing, but a thunder of infinite weepings smote his ears.

Virgil seemed pale, and this renewed Dante's fear, for if the guide were troubled, how could the guided venture to enter the abyss? But Virgil reassured him, saying that it was pity, and not fear, that made him pale. So the two travellers entered the first circle of the infernal valley.

Here the torment seemed to be less great, for although sighs could be heard through the dim air, there was no weeping. Dante saw a great crowd of people—children, women, and men—and Virgil turned to tell him the meaning of what was before them.

'This is Limbo,' Virgil said. 'The spirits here did no evil, but they lived before Christ came to earth, and were not baptized, thus not worshipping God aright. Of these am I myself, and this is my resting-place. Since we did no sin, we have no active punishment, except that we can never enter Paradise; so without hope we live in desire.'

Great sadness filled Dante's heart when he heard these words, for he knew that many great and worthy men must be in this place.

As they were speaking the two had continued onwards, but had not gone far when, in the distance, Dante saw a region of brilliant light which shone out through the darkness around, and within the light were many spirits, who seemed thus to be distinguished among the others.

'Poet, you who are the honour of every science and art,' said Dante, 'what are these people who are so honoured that they live in the light, while all else is darkness?'

Virgil answered: 'These are they who were famous and great in the world above, and their fame still remains, thus gaining them a privileged place here below.'

While he was still speaking, a voice rang out from the brilliant sphere of light. 'Honour to the high poet whose shade returns to us!' it said. And four great spirits came forward into the darkness to meet the travellers. Their faces did not seem sorrowful, but neither were they glad. Virgil turned to Dante, saying: 'See him with the sword in his hand, who comes before the others, as if he were their master! That is Homer, the sovereign poet; the next is Horace, the satirist; the third is Ovid; and the last Lucan. All were poets as I was, and therefore do they greet me thus.'

He went forward and spoke a little with the others, so that Dante saw those lords of highest song assembled together. After a while they turned and greeted him and did him honour, making him a sixth among them.

Then they all went forward together towards the light, and came to the foot of a Noble Castle, encircled by high sevenfold walls, and guarded by a fair stream of water. Over this they passed, and through seven gates, reaching a meadow of fresh grass on which was

a company of people, who had great authority in their bearing; their eyes were slow and grave, and they spoke rarely, but with sweet voices. These were the inhabitants of the Noble Castle of Fame.

Dante and Virgil, with their companions, moved to one side of the meadow, to an open place a little raised above the rest, so that all could be seen thence. Many great spirits who were wandering freely over the shining green grass were pointed out to Dante. He saw Electra, Hector, Aeneas, and Caesar in armour with his falcon eyes. Then he saw Aristotle, sitting among many learned men, and all deferred to him and paid him honour. Socrates was with him, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, Euclid, and many more.

But the travellers could not stay longer in that pleasant place, so their four companions left them, and they went on by another road, out of the quiet, into the trembling air, and they came to a place where all was darkness.

#### IN THE SECOND CIRCLE OF HELL, DANTE MEETS PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

As they went they descended from the first circle of Hell, wherein were the honourable men of old time, to the second circle, which was somewhat smaller but contained infinitely more sorrow and torment.

As they approached the entrance to this second circle they saw Minos (the Infernal Judge), half-man

and half-beast, who sat there eternally, allotting to each sinner his rightful place of punishment. Minos did not speak, but as each sinner came before him he wound his tail round his body a certain number of times, and this number corresponded to the circle of Hell wherein the spirit was to suffer eternal punishment.

When the travellers had passed him by, they came to a place of darkness, wherein was much lamentation and the roaring of great winds, storming like a tempest-tossed sea. Here were punished those who had loved too much, or wrongly placed their love. As on earth they had chosen to be tossed on the winds of passion, so here they were swept eternally round the abyss by an unceasing whirlwind, which buffeted and tormented them, as a flock of starlings flying in winter-time is buffeted by the icy blast; and the souls whirled round in a long line, lamenting as flying cranes lament.

Among these souls Virgil named to Dante many famous men and women—Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Achilles, Paris, Tristan, and many more, ladies and knights of ancient time, so that Dante was overcome by pity, and besought Virgil to let him speak with two of the spirits who were swept round together, never leaving each other's side, and who seemed to move lightly upon the wind.

Virgil said to him: 'When they are swept round again to us, call them by that love which leads them, and they will come.'

So Dante waited a little, and then cried out: 'O weary souls, come hither and speak to us, if none denies you!'

Then, as doves descend to the nest, with wings stretched out and motionless, so the two spirits came through the dark air towards the poets, such entreaty had there been in Dante's loving cry.

These were Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo, and in answer to Dante's questioning, Francesca told their story thus:

'Gracious and kindly living soul! Were the King of the Universe our friend, we would pray him for your peace, since you are so pitiful towards us. Your guide knows well that there is no greater sorrow than remembering past happiness in a time of pain, but since you would know our story, I will speak of it. I was born on that shore where the River Po finds rest in the sea. Greatly did I love Paolo, and he me; but our love was unlawful. So Love, which is the nature of a gentle heart, Love, which cannot be denied, Love led us two to one death, and the manner of it still offends me.'

She had no need to tell more of her tragic story, for Dante knew that Francesca had been a maiden destined by her father's will to wed one Gianciotto of Rimini, but since Gianciotto was deformed and ugly, he had sent his fair young brother Paolo to fetch the maid from her father's home. Francesca, on first seeing the young man, imagined him to be her future husband, and placed her affections upon him, while



Paolo loved her in return. Even when she discovered that he was not to be her husband, the two continued their unlawful love; and years later, since Gianciotto could not win Francesca's affection, he was overcome by jealousy, and slew both her and the fair Paolo. Since their love was unlawful, here were they punished, and here Dante saw them.

As Francesca was speaking, Paolo stood silently by, and wept so bitterly that Dante was wholly conquered by his pity, and fell fainting to the ground.

#### THE STYGIAN MARSH AND THE WALLS OF THE CITY OF DIS

For a while Dante knew nothing more, but when he recovered his senses he found himself no longer in the circle of the carnal sinners, but entering upon the next stage of his journey. With Virgil's guidance he passed through many new regions of torment, wherein differing kinds of sins were punished. He saw the circle of the Gluttonous, where cold, heavy rain and foul snow poured down unceasingly, and the three-headed Cerberus barked over the sinners, and also that place where the Avaricious were punished, and others as well. He saw many spirits whom he had known personally or by report, and some he spoke with.

After a long and weary time, and much hard journeying, the poets entered a boat to cross over a

loathsome, unclean marsh, formed by the waters of the River Styx, and in this marsh the spirits of the Wrathful were immersed. The air was thick and full of mist, but as they went Dante suddenly heard a new wailing coming from ahead, so that he strained his eyes through the fog, to see what it might be.

Virgil said to him: 'Now, my son, we are approaching the City of Dis—you may see it there before you with its turrets glowing red because of the burning fire within.'

Dante looked and saw that they had come beneath the walls of that sorrowful city, and the walls rose high above him, seeming to be all of iron and glowing fiery red, as Virgil had said. Their boat crossed the marsh and circled round the towers, and they disembarked before the gates. Then Dante looked up and saw on the turrets above the gates more than a thousand creatures, whom he knew to have been the angels who fell from Heaven with Lucifer, and they were angrily pointing and crying out: 'Who is that who goes living through the kingdom of the dead?'

Virgil made a sign that he wished to speak to them in secret; and at that they were a little pacified, and called out:

'Come, but come alone, and let that one who has dared to come hither return alone over his foolish path, if he can!'

Then, indeed, Dante despaired of ever returning to the world above, and he besought Virgil most earnestly not to leave him, and urged that they should return

together over the path by which they had come, if further progress was denied to them. But Virgil consoled him, saying that none could deny them their journey, for it had been assigned to them by a greater Power than any below.

'Wait for me here,' he said, 'and cheer your spirit with hope, for I will not leave you in this low world.'

So Dante waited, still uncertain whether to hope or to fear. He could not hear the parley, but after a while he saw the demons rush back again within the city walls, closing its gates in the face of Virgil, who returned to Dante's side slowly and with downcast face. But again he consoled Dante, saying: 'Do not fear if I seem to hesitate. We shall yet conquer their insolence—already help is being sent down to us.' Then he stood waiting, as one who listens, for little could be seen through the dark air and thick fog around them.

As they waited there and spoke together, Dante chanced to look up, and on the summit of one of the high, glowing towers he saw a dreadful sight. The three infernal Furies had risen up there; they had the limbs and attitudes of women, but were all stained with blood, and had snakes for girdles, and hair of little twisting serpents.

'See Megaera on the left hand,' said Virgil; 'the one on the right is Alecto, and Tisiphone is between them.'

The Furies were clawing their breasts and shrieking aloud; then suddenly they looked down, and each

began to cry out: 'Let Medusa come, and we will change him to stone!'

Then Virgil spoke quickly to Dante: 'Turn round and close your eyes, for if the Gorgon shows herself, and you should see her, then indeed there would be no return to earth for you.'

And he did not trust to Dante's will alone, but turned him by the shoulders and placed his hands over his eyes for complete safety.

As they stood thus, they heard a crashing sound echoing over the muddy Stygian waters, and both the shores trembled at it. It seemed like the blast which crashes through a forest in the midst of the summer heats, beating down the boughs and sweeping the dust before it, while the wild beasts and shepherds flee. Then Virgil took his hands from Dante's eyes, and said:

'Now look yonder, across the river—there where the mist is most thick.'

As Dante looked, he saw a spirit approaching, passing dry-shod across the marsh, and moving his left hand before his face to wave aside the thick and heavy air. Dante knew that he was a messenger from Heaven, and at Virgil's bidding he remained silent, bowing down in reverence. The angel reached the city gate and touched it with a rod, so that it opened at once before him. Then he upbraided the inmates.

'O outcasts from Heaven—despised people!' he cried. 'Why are you thus stubborn? Well do you know that it avails nothing to rebel against the

Supreme Will. What profits it to butt against the Fates?'

Then he turned back over the path by which he had come, and spoke no word to the poets, but seemed to be absorbed by other cares. So Dante and Virgil, secure after his rebuke, moved onward and entered the city unhindered.

#### THE BURNING TOMBS OF THE HERETICS, AND THE CENTAURS ROUND THE RIVER PHLEGETHON

When the travellers had gained entrance to the city of Dis, Dante was eager to learn what such a strong fortress might contain. As at Arles, by the estuary of the Rhône, there are great burial-places which make all the ground uneven, so was the earth broken up within the walls of this city; but here flames were all about among the tombs, and each tomb was so molten red from the fire that no blacksmith could need his iron more glowing. Dante saw before him many sepulchres with raised lids, and sighs and groans came from within them, so that he knew sinners were suffering torments there. And Virgil told him that these were the heretics who had not worshipped God rightly, and those whose heresy had been most grievous were lying in the most fiercely burning tombs. With some of these heretics Dante had speech, for some were natives of his own city, Florence.

Then the two poets passed on among the rows of glowing sepulchres, and as they went Virgil explained to Dante the shape and structure of Hell, which was like a deep hollow cone inverted in the earth, wherein a different sin was punished at each level, and those guilty of the most grievous sins were set the deepest.

But the Roman poet broke off his words in order to point the way they must go, which led down a steep and rocky precipice, difficult and perilous to descend, and made still more fearful by what they saw lying across their path at the summit of the slope. There before them was the Minotaur, the monster half-man and half-bull, and when it saw the travellers it gnawed itself like one consumed with mad rage.

Virgil spoke to it, and it began to plunge backwards and forwards in wild fury. The Roman poet, seeing this, cried to Dante:

'Run to the pathway, for while the beast rages like this it is the moment to descend!'

So Dante ran, with Virgil following him, and they left the furious creature behind them. Then they began to climb down the precipice, with the rocks moving and slipping beneath Dante's feet. As they went he looked down, and in the plain beneath saw Phlegethon, a wide, crimson river of blood, and in it were immersed the spirits of murderers and tyrants, and of all those who had done violence to others. Between the river bank and the foot of the precipice he saw many Centaurs, wise beasts with horses' bodies and the breasts and heads of men. They were moving



one behind another, carrying bows and arrows as if armed for hunting.

As these creatures saw the poets descend they all stood still, and three came forward from the band, with arrows set ready to shoot.

One of them cried:

'To what punishment are you condemned, ye that descend hither? Speak quickly, or I draw my bow!'

Dante's wise guide answered him: 'Be not so hasty! We will give our answer to Chiron only.' Then he turned to Dante, saying: 'That was Nessus who spoke; the great Chiron who nursed Achilles is also yonder, and the third is the wrathful Pholus. The Centaurs move by thousands round the banks of this river, and draw their bows against any sinner who tries to leave the flood.'

As he was speaking the poets had approached, and the shaggy Chiron took an arrow and parted his beard with its point. When he had uncovered his great mouth, he said to his companions:

'Do you see that one of the two is so heavy that his weight moves the rocks he treads on? The feet of the dead do not move the rocks thus!'

Virgil had heard, and answered quickly: 'Indeed he is yet living, and I am his guide through this dark valley. By that Virtue which ordained our journey I ask you to give us one of your band to guide us to the ford, and to carry my charge over it, for he is no spirit that can move through the air.'

Chiron turned to Nessus and bade him lead the

travellers. So they followed the great Centaur along the banks of the boiling crimson river, and as they went Nessus pointed out many sinners in the flood, and named them.

Little by little the stream grew shallower, until the sinners stood only ankle-deep. Here were the highwaymen, and since they had done less violence than the tyrants and murderers, their punishment was less severe; for the murderers were wholly immersed in the river of blood, while the highwaymen had but their feet dyed crimson.

And here, in this shallow place, was the ford. The two poets passed over it, and then Nessus turned back and left them to pursue their journey.

#### THE WOOD OF THE SUICIDES

Nessus had scarcely recrossed the river when Dante and Virgil came to the edge of a wood, through which there seemed to be no path. The trees in that wood did not grow straight and fair, their leaves were not green, and they bore no fruit, but were all twisted and gnarled and withered, and poison apples hung upon them. In the trees were the nests of the foul Harpies—which have human heads, but great bird-wings, feathered bodies, and feet with claws—and these creatures perched by their nests and cried horribly.

The whole wood seemed to be full of wailings and

lamentations, so that Dante was amazed and could only think that men must be hiding among the trees and complaining thus. But Virgil, who understood his thoughts, said: 'Break off a little twig from one of these branches, and you will learn your error.'

So Dante did as he was bid, and stretched out his hand and snapped off a twig. But the tree which he had injured seemed to writhe with pain, and a voice came out of it.

'Why do you tear me thus?' it cried. 'Have you no spirit of pity? All of us here were once men, and now we are turned to trees. Indeed you should have been more pitiful had we been the souls of serpents.'

Out of the end of the broken branch words and blood seemed to be coming together, with a hissing sound, like that made by a green twig which is burning at one end. Dante was so astonished that he dropped the broken piece and stood in fear.

But Virgil spoke to the tree. 'O injured spirit,' he said, 'indeed I urged him to hurt you, although it grieved me, but there was no other way for him to believe the truth of your condition—he would not have been convinced by my words alone. But he can make you some amends, for he is allowed to return to the world above, and will refresh the memory of you in men's minds. Therefore tell him who you were.'

Then the tree spoke in answer. 'You encourage me so gently, and with such sweet words, that I cannot be silent. I was Pier della Vigna, most trusted counsellor and friend of the great Frederick of Sicily,

and truly he had no secrets from me. But envy, that common vice of courts, inspired men's minds against me. I was accused of betraying my master, and so proud was I that I met my death by my own hand—but I swear to you that I was innocent of treachery, and if in truth you return to the world above, I beg you to clear my memory from the unjust accusation.'

Virgil urged him further to tell how the souls of those who killed themselves became imprisoned in the tree-trunks, and whether they could ever escape from them. So Piero continued, and his voice whistled out of the broken bough:

'When the spirits of suicides leave their human bodies, the judge Minos condemns them to this seventh circle of Hell, and they fall down to this wood, and take root, and spring up like grains of wheat wherever they chance to fall, and grow to saplings, and then to these distorted trees, and the Harpies feed on their leaves, and thereby cause the souls much pain. On the Day of Judgment, like all other men we shall return to our discarded bodies, but since we left them of our own free will we shall not re-enter them, since it is not just that we should have again that which we cast away. We shall bring them down hither to this sorrowful wood, and each body will be hung upon the tree in which its unhappy spirit dwells.'

As Dante and Virgil were listening to Pier della Vigna's words, they were startled by a sudden crashing through the wood, as if men were chasing a wild boar. They turned, and saw two naked spirits in human

form, who were fleeing and crying out in terror, and breaking their way through the brush, for they were pursued by troops of black hounds, eager and panting, which filled the whole wood behind them. One spirit seemed to be exhausted, for he hid behind a bush; but it was of no avail, for the hounds broke through the bush, tore him to pieces, and carried off his mangled limbs.

Then the bush began to lament and cry out through its broken branches, and Virgil led Dante up to it, and questioned it, and the two poets learnt that the bush enclosed the soul of a Florentine who also had died by his own hand. So Dante, for love of his native city, gathered up the scattered leaves and the twigs which the hounds had broken off, and piled them at the foot of the bush. Then he and Virgil passed out of that unhappy wood, in which every tree contained a human spirit.

DANTE HEARS THE STORY OF THE OLD MAN OF CRETE  
AND THEN MEETS BRUNETTO LATINI

The travellers passed on, and came to a new place of torment, which bordered the wood, just as the wood had fringed the River Phlegethon. This new place seemed like a desert, for the ground was of dry, thick sand, and nothing grew on it; but over all the expanse of sand there was a slow, heavy rain of great flakes of fire, steady and silent like the snow which falls among

the mountains on a windless day. Ceaselessly these fire-flakes fell, scorching the sand intolerably, and under this burning rain were many bands of naked spirits; some lying prone, some crouching, and others wandering to and fro. All wept bitterly, and their hands moved restlessly as they tried to beat off the flakes of fire which fell upon them.

These were those who had done violence against God or against nature, and amongst them were many proud blasphemers.

As they stood and watched, the poets spoke to some of these sinners, and then Virgil turned to Dante and said:

'Follow me, my son, and beware that you do not tread upon the burning sand, but keep your feet back near the edge of the wood.'

So they went forward in silence, and came to a place where there was a small stream flowing out of the wood. Its banks were a little raised, and seemed to be made of stone; and Virgil pointed them out to Dante, saying that this must be their path, for along these banks no fire could pass and they might walk in safety.

'And more must I tell you, my son,' he said, 'for these rivers below have all one common source, and it is well that you should know of it.

'In the world above there is a desolate land set in the midst of the sea, and this island is called Crete. Upon it there is a mountain, bare and deserted, which was once glad with waters and leafy trees, and within



the mountain stands a huge Old Man, with his face turned towards Rome. His head is made of fine gold, his arms and breast of pure silver, and below that he is of brass, to where his legs divide. Thence downwards he is all of solid iron, except that his right foot is made of clay, and he puts more weight on this foot than on the other. Each part of him except his head is cleft and fissured, and from the cracks tears drop down, and they drip from rock to rock down into this abyss, forming the rivers of Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon. Thereafter these waters descend to the lowest place and make the lake of Cocytus, and this we shall see presently, so I have no need to describe it to you. Such is the Old Man of Crete, and all the waters that moisten this low world come from such a source.'

When Virgil had finished his tale the poets passed along the raised and hardened margin of the stream, leaving the wood behind them, and crossing the burning sand. As they went, a troop of spirits approached them, coming alongside the bank, each spirit gazing closely at the travellers, as an old tailor peers at the eye of his needle.

One of them recognized Dante, and caught hold of his clothing, saying: 'What a wonder!'

Dante looked at him and, although he was much changed by the scorching of the sand and falling fire, knew him to be Brunetto Latini, a man whom Dante had known and loved well in life, who had been as a father to him, and had given him much noble teaching.

'Is it indeed you, Ser Brunetto?' Dante cried; and Brunetto answered:

'O my son! Let me come with you a little, while my company goes by.'

Dante begged him most earnestly to do so, and although he dared not step down on to the sand, he walked with head bent low, in reverence and respect for his old master.

'What chance or destiny brings you down hither while you are yet in life?' Brunetto asked. 'And who is he that guides you?'

'Above in the fair world,' said Dante, 'I lost myself in a valley before my age was full. This man appeared to me there, and is leading me homeward by this path.'

Then Dante and Brunetto had much loving speech together, and the master promised his old pupil a glorious haven at last, if he followed his star, but also told him that he would be caused much sorrow by his ungrateful fellow-Florentines.

Dante also learnt many of the names of the others who were punished in that circle. But after a while his old master broke off their discourse and said that he might delay no longer; and he turned and ran so fast that he seemed like a winner, not a loser, at the race which is held yearly at Verona.

After him came others whom Dante knew, fellow-Florentines who recognized him and spoke to him. They talked much of Florence, and of how courtesy and valour had left her, so that she had fallen on evil days and was already suffering for her pride and greed.

They begged Dante that when he returned to earth he would keep their fame alive among men—and then they fled so fast that their nimble legs seemed wings.

The travellers had passed so far along the margin of the stream that they could hear its waters falling into the circle beneath, and the sound seemed like the hum around a beehive. But when they had gone a little further, they could scarcely hear each other speak, for the hum became the thunder of a rushing torrent, as the waters plunged over a steep precipice. So, when they reached the brink, the poets paused, and Dante wondered how they could descend by such a cataract.

#### THE DESCENT ON GERYON'S BACK

As they stood on the brink of the precipice, Dante looked down, and could see no possible stairway of descent. But he had a cord girt round his waist, and at Virgil's bidding he unloosed it and gave it to his guide, who threw the coiled end down the cliff beneath them, leaning over to see where it fell.

'Surely,' thought Dante, 'some new thing must answer this new signal!'

And indeed, as he looked, he saw a vast Shape swimming up through the thick dark air, moving as a man moves who has dived into the sea to free an anchor from encumbrance, and who, as he comes up again, stretches his arms over his head and gathers his feet up beneath him.

'See the evil beast with the pointed tail: Geryon, the unclean image of Fraud, that passes mountains, breaks through walls and defences, and pollutes the whole world!'

So spoke Virgil; and the form of the creature Dante saw is scarcely to be believed. It had the face of a just man, with a mild and kindly expression, but the rest of its body was that of a reptile. It had two hairy paws, and its back and breast and flanks were covered with knots and twists of many-coloured hair. Neither Turk nor Tartar ever made cloth with more interwoven hues, nor did Arachne ever weave such webs!

Virgil beckoned it to land, and the foul creature placed its head and paws upon the bank, leaving its hindquarters hanging over the abyss, with the great scorpion-pointed tail twisting upwards. Virgil spoke to the beast, bidding it lend them its stout shoulders for the descent.

Then he mounted on its back, and said to Dante: 'Now be strong and bold, for by such stairs must we descend! Climb up in front, for I wish to be behind, so that the tail may not hurt you.'

Dante trembled, and grew pale with fear, but was ashamed to speak of his terror to Virgil. So he climbed up, and longed to say: 'Hold me fast before you!' but he was trembling too much to give voice to his thought. But Virgil did as he had wished, and clasped him strongly, saying to Geryon: 'Now move!—but move slowly, and make your circles large and gradual—think of the unusual burden that you bear!'

As a boat moves backwards from its mooring-place, so Geryon moved and then turned his back to where his head had been, and, stretching out his tail, shook it like an eel, while he gathered in the air before him with his paws.

Phaethon feared no more greatly when he dropped the reins of the Sun's chariot, nor unhappy Icarus when he felt the wax of his wings melting, than did Dante when air was all around him and he could see nothing except the beast on which he sat.

Geryon swam slowly through the air, wheeling and descending, but Dante could not perceive their motion except by the wind upon his face. After a little he heard again the roar of the torrent beneath them, and bent his gaze downwards. Then he became still more fearful at the idea of dismounting, for he saw great fires and heard much lamenting below. Geryon descended as a falcon does, when it is weary and has been long on the wing, and set the two poets down, close to the foot of the precipitous crag. Then, freed from their weight, the monster bounded off like an arrow from a bowstring, leaving them in this lower Hell.

#### DANTE MEETS POPE NICHOLAS III

As Dante stood and gazed, he saw before him Malebolge, the circle of Hell at the foot of the precipice which the poets had just descended. In its centre

yawned a great pit, wide and deep, which led to yet another lower part of that place of eternal punishment. So Dante saw Malebolge to be in form like a wide platform, circling round between the foot of the precipice and the edge of the great central abyss. The platform was divided into ten pits or valleys, each separated from each by high banks, as when a castle is girded by successive moats. And over the banks there were bridges leading from the base of the cliff to the central pit, so that the path of the two travellers lay over these bridges.

Virgil led the way, and Dante followed him, gazing down into the pits as he passed, and seeing many sinners and many kinds of punishment; and sometimes the sinners' lot was made more hard, for some were scourged ceaselessly by horned demons.

When they came to the third pit, and were on that part of the bridge which overhung the middle of it, Dante stood amazed, and rendered tribute to the justice and wisdom of God, who had decreed such a punishment for the foul crime of simony—the sin of Simon Magus, whereby men take gold and silver for the gifts of the Spirit, which are a prize for righteousness alone.

For beneath him, in the iron-coloured rock of which all Malebolge was made, Dante saw many holes all of one size, and from each hole protruded the feet and half the legs of a sinner, and each was fixed thus, with his head and the rest of his body within the rock. Nor was this all their torment, for the soles of their



feet were on fire and burned from the heels to the toes as oiled surfaces burn, and each sinner kicked and struggled so fiercely that had he been bound with strong cords they would have broken in pieces.

'Master,' cried Dante, 'who is that one who struggles more violently than the others, and seems burned by a fiercer flame?'

Virgil answered: 'If you wish me to carry you down to that lower bank, you will learn from him who he was and in what he sinned.'

Eagerly Dante assented, and Virgil bore him down, climbing by the fourth wall between the pits, and set him by the hole of that sinner whom they had seen kicking so violently.

'Whoever you be,' Dante began, 'who hold your upper part downwards, unhappy spirit planted like a stake—speak, if you can!'

The spirit cried: 'Are you there already, Boniface? Were you so quickly tired of that wealth for which you seized your place in Rome by treachery, and made such evil gains from it?'

For this spirit had been Pope Nicholas III, and he took Dante to be Boniface VIII, who amassed great wealth in the Papal Chair, and cared more for things of the world than for things of God. But Dante, at Virgil's bidding, answered him quickly: 'I am not he whom you think me to be.'

Then the sinner twisted his feet more strongly, and sighed, and said in a weeping voice:

'Then what do you ask of me? If you would know

who I am, learn that I was a pope, and was so eager to gain power and renown for my family that on earth I sought wealth alone, and here am I myself fixed as in a purse. Beneath my head, deep in the fissures of the rock, are those who were simonists before me, and I too shall fall down within, when Boniface comes hither. I shall be pushed further into the rock, and he will be planted here with burning feet.'

Dante was filled with indignation against this wicked pope, and said to him:

'Now tell me, when our Lord gave the Great Keys into St. Peter's keeping, how much wealth did He require of him? Did He ask aught else than that Peter should follow Him? Nor did the other Apostles ask gold or silver of Matthias, when he was chosen by lot to take the place of Judas. Therefore stay you here, for justly are you punished! And were I not restrained by reverence for those Great Keys which you held in life, I should use yet sterner words, for the greed of you and your like oppresses the whole world, casting down the good and raising up the wicked. You priests have made a god of gold and silver, and how do you differ from idolaters, save that they worship one false god and you worship many, in the form of coins!'

While Dante was speaking thus, Nicholas kicked still more violently with both his feet, either from rage or from an evil conscience. But Virgil seemed to be pleased with his charge's words, for he smiled as he listened to them.

Then he took Dante up in both his arms and carried

him up the path by which they had descended, which was so steep that it would have been a hard passage even for goats, and set him down gently on the rough bridge which overhung the fourth pit of Malebolge.

DANTE SEES THE PUNISHMENT OF THE MAGICIANS  
AND SOOTHSAYERS

In that fourth pit they saw the punishment of those who practised the evil arts of witchcraft: diviners, sorcerers, and the like.

The travellers looked down into the depth and saw spirits coming silently, at the slow pace of those who chant litanies, and as they came they wept.

At first Dante knew not what these sinners were, for as they approached round the circular pit each seemed wholly distorted, with his face turned round on his shoulders, so that he walked forward, while looking backward. But when the Florentine poet saw the fair image of man thus distorted, so that each spirit, in weeping, bathed his back with tears, he leaned upon the rocks and wept also, for how could he remain dry-eyed at such a sight?

But Virgil reproved him. 'Here pity should be wholly dead,' he said. 'Be not like other fools, for none is more impious than he who sorrows at God's righteous judgment. Lift up your head and see the diviner Amphiaraus, who has made a breast of his shoulders; since in life he willed to see too far before

him, now must he ever look backwards. And there is the soothsayer Manto, whose flowing tresses cover her breast, and whose shoulders are before her. She it was who, after passing through many lands, first dwelt at Mantua, my native city, and therefore I will speak of her.

'Above, in fair Italy, there lies a lake at the foot of the Alpine hills, and this lake is called Benacus. Thence the River Mincio flows down through green meadows, but flows not far before it reaches a level place over which it spreads, making a treacherous marsh. Manto passed that way, and saw land amidst the marsh, land which was bare, and naked of inhabitants. There she stayed her steps to fly from all human intercourse and to practise her arts; there she lived, and there at death she left her body. Afterwards, the men who dwelt round about gathered in that place, since it was strongly guarded by the marsh. They built a city over Manto's bones and called it Mantua, after her who first chose the place. So that if ever you hear told another origin for my city, deny it, and tell the truthful tale.'

Then Virgil showed Dante many other diviners and sorcerers, and wretched women who had left the needle and thread and made themselves witches, working their evil arts with herbs and images.

'But come,' Virgil said at last, 'the moon is already setting; it is near daybreak, and we must hasten.'

So the travellers moved onward and left the pit of the soothsayers.

## THE DEMONS AND THE RIVER OF BOILING PITCH

The travellers passed on over the bridge, and when they had come to the fifth pit, Dante looked down into the horrible darkness beneath.

In winter the Venetians boil sticky pitch in their shipyards, and since the weather is too stormy for them to put to sea, some caulk the hulls of boats which have made many voyages, some build their boats anew, some hammer at the prow and some at the stern, others make oars and others twist ropes, one mends the jib and one the mainsail.

And, as in Venice, so here in this valley there boiled a dense pitch, which clung to the banks on each side. So much Dante saw, but he could see nothing in the pitch, except the bubbles raised by the boiling, and the heaving and seething of the whole.

While he stood peering down at it, Virgil caught him aside, crying: 'Take care! Take care!' Dante turned round swiftly, to see what he must beware of, but when he saw he was bitterly afraid. For behind the poets rushed up a black demon, fierce of aspect, light of foot, and with wings outspread. Across his sharp high shoulders he bore a sinner, and clasped him by the ankles.

'You there, Malebranche!' he cried, 'here is one of the elders of Lucca—thrust him beneath the pitch while I go back for others; every one in that city is a barrator, and trades his public office for vile gain!' The demon hurled the sinner down towards the black

river, then wheeled round, running back along the top of the rocky cliff. His prey splashed into the pitch, sinking beneath it, and then came up again, writhing. But a crowd of other demons, who had been hiding beneath the bridge, sprang out, crying:

'Here you swim not in your own River Serchio, so do not come out above the pitch, unless you want to feel our claws!'

Then they beat him down, as a cook holds boiling meat down in the pot with hooks, so that it may not float.

Dante's kind guide said to him: 'Crouch down and hide behind a crag of rock, so that they cannot see you; and whatever may be done to me, do not fear, for I have been here before, and I know how to face their insolence.'

So Dante hid himself, and Virgil went forward alone. Truly he had need to bear himself steadfastly, for the demons rushed furiously at him with their claws outstretched, as dogs rush out at a beggar.

But he cried: 'Do not touch me! First, let one among you come forward and speak with me, and then take counsel with the others as to harming me.'

All the demons cried: 'Let Malacoda go!' and one of them came forward, leaving the others.

'Think you, Malacoda,' said Virgil, 'that I should have come hither safely if the Divine Will had not ordained my journey? Let me pass on, for it is willed in Heaven that I show this savage way to another.'



When he heard this, the demon's pride seemed to leave him, and he let fall his hook, calling to the others: 'Do not hurt him!'

Then Virgil called out to Dante: 'You who are crouching among the crags of rock—come now in safety to my side!' So Dante came out from his hiding-place, but when the devils saw him they all pressed forward, so that it seemed doubtful whether they would obey their leader's order. Dante kept close to his guide, and did not turn his eyes from the demons, for he heard them muttering together.

One said: 'Shall I claw him on the back?' and another answered: 'Yes, scrape him well!'

But the fiend who had spoken with Virgil turned and bade them be silent. Then he said to the poets: 'You cannot go further by this bridge, for it is all broken down, but if you still wish to go forward, pass along these crags, for near at hand there is another rocky path which crosses the abyss. I am sending some of my company along there to see if any sinner be out cooling himself from the pitch—go with them, for they will not harm you.' Then he called out: 'Come forward, Alichino and Calcabrina, and you, Cagnazzo, Libicocco, Draghignazzo, Ciriatto the tusked, Graffiacane, Farfarello, and raging Rubicante. Barbariccia is to be your leader. Go you round the boiling pitch, and see these two travellers are safe as far as the other crag which bridges the pits.'

'Master!' cried Dante, 'let us go alone without escort, if you know the way. Do you not see

how they are scowling and grinding their teeth at us?'

'Do not fear,' Virgil replied; 'let them scowl, for they do it at the sinners in the pitch.'

So the travellers went on with their demon guides—truly a hideous company!—but fitting in that place, for the proverb says: 'In church with saints and in the tavern with drunkards.' So, with the ten fiends, they went forward on their way to the sixth pit of Hell's eighth circle.

As they went they watched the seething, pitchy river, and, as dolphins show their backs out of the sea for a sign to mariners, so Dante saw the sinners now and then arching their backs out of the pitch to ease their pain, and others showing their heads on each side of the pit. As Barbariccia and his troop approached, all slipped down again beneath the black, seething mass; but one was slow in ducking, and Graffiaccane, who was nearest to him, caught him by his pitchy hair and hooked him up, as though he were an otter. All the fiends screamed out: 'Hook him! Claw him! Flay him well!'

Dante, who had watched it all with horror, turned to Virgil and said:

'Master, can you learn who that unhappy spirit is, who has thus fallen into the hands of his tormentors?'

Virgil went to the sinner's side and asked him whence he came.

'I was one Ciampolo,' the spirit answered, 'born in the Kingdom of Navarre, and placed in the service

of a great lord. Later I served the good King Thibault, and practised barratry, for he made me the steward of many of his bounties, and I sold them vilely for money, to my own gain. For that I pay the reckoning in this heat!’

While he spoke, the demon Cagnazzo, who had great hog’s tusks protruding from each side of his mouth, made him feel how one of them could rip. But Barbariccia shielded the sinner in his arms, crying ‘Stand off!’ to the other fiends, and bade Virgil speak on, if he wished to know more.

Virgil was questioning Ciampolo further, learning that other Latins were beneath the pitch with him, when Libicocco shouted: ‘We have endured too much!’ and sprang upon the sinner with his hook.

The terrified Ciampolo cried: ‘If you would see and speak with any Tuscans or Lombards I will make them come out, for we have a whistling sign, by which any who comes up from the pitch and sees no fiends tells his fellows below that they may safely show themselves. Only keep off their evil claws, and I will make seven or more come up!’

When Cagnazzo heard this, he raised his snout and shook his head, saying:

‘Oho! listen to his trickery! He hopes thus that we will stand back and let him throw himself beneath!’

But Alichino said: ‘He could not escape us—let us wager it. Let him go, and before he is beneath, I, on the wing, will catch him in mid-air!’

All the fiends began to argue, neglecting their

prisoner. Ciampolo chose his time well, braced his feet strongly on the rock, then flung himself down towards the boiling river.

The demons sprang forward, and Alichino launched himself into the air, crying: 'I have you!' But it was of little use, for the sinner's terror carried him faster than wings could bear the fiend.

Ciampolo went beneath, and the demon, swooping, was forced to swerve up from the pitch, like a falcon cheated of a diving duck. He swept upwards, angry and deluded, and Calcabrina, furious, and blaming Alichino for the trick, flew after him, eager for a quarrel.

The two turned their talons on each other, and in the struggle, as they ripped and tore and scratched, both dropped down into the middle of the boiling pitch. The heat separated them at once, but they could not free themselves or fly, for their wings were all sticky and beglued.

Barbariccia, the leader of the band, sent four of the other demons speedily over to the further bank, so from this side and from that claws were reached out towards the two in the centre of the black stream, who were already scalded with its boiling.

Dante and Virgil had watched it all, but now they thought it safer to depart. So they went on, leaving Calcabrina and Alichino struggling furiously in the middle of the seething pitch.

DANTE SEES THE HYPOCRITES BENEATH THEIR  
LEADEN CLOAKS

Silently and without escort the poets went on their way, the one before, and the other after. But as he went, Dante thought: 'These fiends have been put to scorn because of us, and have been cheated and hurt in such a way that fury will be added to their previous malice. Surely, then, they will pursue us more fiercely than a dog pursues a running hare!'

Then he looked behind him, and said to Virgil: 'Master, hide us both speedily! I fear the Malebranche, and I think they are already coming after us.'

Virgil replied: 'My son, if your mind were of glass I could not see your thoughts more quickly than I now divine them. Already had I thought as you do; and if we can descend here into the further pit we shall escape their pursuit, for their station is in the fifth chasm, and beyond that they cannot go.'

He was still speaking when Dante saw the demons coming after them in haste, with wings outspread.

Virgil seized his charge quickly—as a mother who rescues her child from the flames, caring more for him than for herself—and he fled down the bank, carrying Dante upon his shoulders as if he had been his own son. Scarcely had the two reached the level bed of the pit below when the fiends came up upon the height above, but they were harmless then, since they could not leave their appointed place.

So Dante and Virgil turned their thoughts to the sixth pit, in which they stood.

There they saw a painted people, endlessly circling the abyss with slow and weary steps, weeping as they went. Each sinner wore a hooded cloak, with the hood pulled deep over his eyes, as do the monks in Cluny: but these cloaks were gilded and shining without, dazzlingly bright, while within they were of lead, intolerably heavy — a weary mantle for eternity!

The poets turned and paced with the sinners, intent upon their plight; but so slowly did the cloaked ones move that the travellers drew level with different ones at every step. So Dante said to Virgil: 'Can we not find one whom we know in person, or by report?'

Thereupon a sinner who understood Dante's tongue cried after him: 'Stay your feet, ye who run so fast through the dim air! Perhaps in me shall you find what you seek.'

Virgil said: 'Wait, and then move at his pace.' So the poets stood still, and saw two who seemed greatly to wish to overtake them, but the narrow way and their heavy cloaks held them back.

When they came up they stared long at Dante in silence, then turned to each other, and one said:

'This man seems alive, for his throat moves; and if they are dead, why do they not wear the heavy cloak?' Then he said to Dante: 'O Tuscan, who have come to the sorrowful place of the hypocrites—do not scorn to tell us who you are.'



Dante answered him: 'In the great city on Arno's fair river was I born, and I am still in that body which I have ever had. But who are you that weep so bitterly? And what is your glittering punishment?'

The spirits replied: 'Our shining cloaks are of such thick lead that they weigh us down, causing our very bones to creak. We were Bolognese friars: he Loderingo by name, and I Catalano, and here we are punished for hypocrisy.'

As they paced on, Dante began: 'O sorrowful friars . . .' but he said no more, for they came upon a spirit lying prone upon the ground, with arms outspread as though he were crucified, and when he saw Dante he groaned and struggled. Friar Catalano said:

'That one there before you was Caiaphas, who counselled the Pharisees that it was meet one man should die for the people. He is stretched thus naked across the narrow road, and has to feel the weight of every one that passes, for all must tread upon him as they go.'

After they had seen Caiaphas, Virgil turned to the friar, asking him if there were any gap by which he and Dante might leave the pit.

'Nearer than you think,' he was answered; 'there is a rocky crag which bridges all the cruel valleys, save this one, for here it is broken. But you could well climb up by its ruins, which slope down hither to the bottom.'

Virgil stood awhile with head bent down, then

said: 'Falsely did Malacoda yonder point the way, for he did not tell us that this bridge was broken.'

'At Bologna I heard many things told of the Devil,' Catalano said, 'and one was, that he is a liar and the father of lies.'

Virgil seemed angry at this, and went onward with rapid steps; so Dante left the laden spirits and followed in his master's footsteps.

#### THE TWO POETS' WEARY CLIMB, AND HOW THEY SAW THE PIT OF THE THIEVES

In the early time of the year, when the hoar frost copies the semblance of snow upon the ground, but endures not so long, the poor shepherd who has no food for his flock rises at early morn and sees the fields all white, so returns into his house lamenting. But later he goes out once more and recovers hope, as he sees the world all changed and green again in so short a time; so that he takes his staff and chases forth his lambs to feed.

In a like manner Virgil's troubled air made Dante despair, but afterwards he was cured of his despair; for when the travellers came to the shattered bridge the Roman poet turned to Dante with an air of calm serenity, such as he had worn before. He had judged the ascent possible, for having first well studied the cliff he took Dante in his arms and lifted him up

towards the top of a huge crag, and pointed out another one above, saying:

'Now climb up thither; but first test the rock, to see whether it will bear your weight.'

Thus they mounted, slowly and painfully, but it was clear that the sinners punished in that pit could not have left it; this was no way of escape for one wearing a leaden cloak, for the poets could scarcely make the ascent, although Virgil's spirit was light, and Dante was pushed up from crag to crag. Had the cliff not been lower on that side of the pit than on the other, they could scarce have reached the summit. But at last they gained the topmost crag, and Dante's lungs were so emptied of breath and he was so strained and weary that he at once sank down to rest. But Virgil chid him for it.

'Now must you cast off sloth,' he said, 'for by resting thus at ease men come not into fame, and without fame man leaves as slight a vestige of himself on earth as does smoke in air or foam on water. So rise! Let your spirit conquer your panting, for a proud spirit can win every battle. We have a longer climb before us—this which we have passed is not enough.'

So Dante rose, and because he was ashamed he showed himself less weary than he felt, and said:

'Go forward, for I am strong and resolute.' Then they set themselves to climb another cliff, which was more craggy, rough, and difficult than the first, and much more steep. As he climbed, Dante talked with

his guide, so that Virgil should not think him weak and faint of spirit. Mounting thus bravely they soon came out on the arch above the next pit; but all seemed dark below, so that Dante said:

'Master, let us pass further along the bridge, for from this point I can see down but distinguish nothing.'

Virgil commended him for his eagerness, and they went down to the bridge-head, whence the pit was clear to them.

Dante saw beneath him a fearful throng of serpents, which were tormenting the spirits in that pit, and he recognized one of the sinners as Vanni Fucci of Pistoia, whom he had known in life as a man of rage and blood.

'What crime thrust you down thither?' Dante called to him.

Fucci looked up to the Florentine poet with a face of shame, and answered:

'I would that you had not seen me in this place of misery, but I cannot refuse to tell you what you ask. I was cast down here because I stole the fair furnishings of the sacristy in Pistoia's cathedral, and others suffered for the crime.'

Then Fucci, furious at having to confess his sin, foretold many sorrows that would fall upon the city of Florence; and he did so out of revenge, for he knew that such tidings would be very bitter to Dante.

The poets then went onwards, and saw other spirits, among them five Florentines, but had no speech with

them, for they were plagued by the serpents in such a fearful way that it is hard to credit it. At the bite of a serpent one sinner became snake-like, while the snake took on human form; other sinners turned at once to ashes when the serpents bit them—and all these spirits suffered punishment for theft.

But Dante was much troubled that he found Florentines among the thieves, suffering such vile punishments, and he wept for his native city, crying bitterly and in scorn:

'Well may you rejoice, O Florence! For you are so great that even in Hell there are many of your citizens!'

Then the poets left the place of the thieves, and mounted again the slow and weary way up the cliff, to reach the eighth pit of Malebolge.

#### DANTE HEARS THE STORY OF THE DEATH OF ULYSSES

Dante and Virgil set themselves to climb these rough and lonely crags, and so steep was the way that they trusted not to their feet alone, but laid hold of the rocks with their hands also. At last they reached the summit, whence they could look down into the gulf, and Dante, eager to perceive, pulled himself upright, still clinging to a crag for safety. And what he saw resembled that which a peasant sees at

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evening as he rests on the hillside and looks down to the valley where he has worked all day, and sees the twilight sparkling with fireflies. This eighth gulf sparkled in a like manner with little points of flame, which seemed to move along the bottom of the chasm, and Dante wondered at it, until Virgil told him that each flame contained a human spirit.

'So much had I guessed to be the case,' said Dante; 'but tell me, my master, what soul is in that fire which is parted at the summit, like twin tongues of flame?'

Virgil answered him:

'Within that double flame are Ulysses and Diomed, who share their punishment as they shared their sin. In that flame they suffer for much evil counsel that they gave in life, and especially for the trick of the wooden horse, by which proud Troy fell.'

Then Dante turned eagerly to Virgil, and besought him with much earnestness to procure him speech with the souls of those two heroes of old, if they were able to speak through the tongues of flame.

'Your request is worthy of much praise,' said Virgil; 'but let me speak to them, for I know what you would learn, and since they were Greeks and men of ancient time, they might perchance scorn your questions.'

So when the horned flame had come a little nearer to the poets, Virgil spoke to it. 'O ye who are two within one fire, if I deserved aught of you when on earth I wrote the high verses, stay a little, and tell how the one of you came to die.'



The larger horn of that double tongue of flame began to waver, like a torch blown upon by the wind, and, moving its tip, as if it were indeed a tongue, a voice came out of it.

‘When I, Ulysses, left the island of Circe, no love for my wife Penelope, or my kindred upon Ithaca, could conquer in me that longing which still possessed me to learn further of the world, and of human virtue and sin. So with one small ship and those companions who still remained to me, I put forth again to the open sea. And I saw both the shores of that sea, Spain and Morocco, and the islands which it bathes. I and my companions were old and slow in movement when we came to that narrow strait where are set the Pillars of Hercules, as a sign that no man should venture beyond them. Then I spoke to my comrades, saying: “O brothers! We through many perils have reached this western boundary of land, and little of life remains to us—let us spend that little in learning something of this unpeopled world ahead of us, that lies behind the sun. Consider your race; you were made not as brute beasts, but as men, to follow after virtue and knowledge.” With this brief speech I made my companions so eager for the voyage that I scarcely could have kept them from it afterwards, had I wished to. So we turned our prow westwards, and bent our oars strongly, heading then towards the south. We left the northern hemisphere behind us, and five nights and five days had we passed on that voyage when, far off and dim in the distance, we saw

a great mountain, which seemed to me higher than any other I had ever seen. We rejoiced, but soon our joy was turned to sorrow, for a great tempest came from off that new land, and it struck our ship and whirled her three times round in the raging sea, until our prow sank and our poop rose; the sea closed over us, and we perished.'

With these words the flame which enclosed the spirit of Ulysses ceased to move, and after a short while it departed from the two poets.

#### GUIDO OF MONTEFELTRO

As the flame of Ulysses and Diomed left them another approached, and drew the travellers' eyes towards it, for a confused sound came forth from its tip—a sound made by words from within that could find no outlet. But after a while they found their path, and the flame moved as if it had been indeed a tongue, and these words came forth:

'O ye whom I heard speaking just now, though I have come perhaps a little late, do not refuse to pause and speak with me also! If you are but just come into this blind world from the fair Latin land, tell me if Romagna is at peace or at war, for I was of the mountains there, near to the source of the Tiber.'

Dante answered him, and told him much of the condition of Romagna, begging the spirit in return to

tell them who it was. Again the flame roared and whistled for a while, and then these words came from it:

'Indeed, I would not speak if I thought my answer were to one who could ever return up yonder, but since I know of no man who has ever returned alive from this pit, I speak freely.

'I was a man of arms, and then I took the cowl, hoping thus to make amends for my sins. And truly it would have atoned for all, had it not been for the great priest, Pope Boniface—may ill befall him!

'He it was who led me back to my former sins, and I will relate the manner of it to you.

'I was Guido of Montefeltro, and in life my deeds had more in them of the fox than of the lion. All wiles and cunning tricks I knew and practised, so that my fame in them went forth to the ends of the earth. When I had come to that time of my life when it behoves a man to think less of this world and more of the next, I grieved for my deeds, and I repented and confessed me, and became a monk. And alack, it would have availed to win me blessedness, but for Boniface, the prince of the new Pharisees—well may he so be called! for he went not to war with infidels, but each enemy of his was a Christian.

'He took no account of the holy gown I wore, but summoned me, and asked counsel of me, for he desired to overcome the strong fortress of Palestrina; and since he knew of my ancient skill and cunning, he thought that perchance I could give him aid. At

first I answered him not, for his words seemed wild, and well I knew that he was demanding evil counsel of me. But he read my thoughts and said:

“Do not doubt, for even before you give me counsel I absolve you from any sin therein; as you know, I hold the keys to shut and open Heaven.” When I heard this, it seemed to me well to speak, so I said:

“Father! my counsel is evil, but since you absolve me of that guilt into which I now must fall, thus do I counsel you. Promise the men of Palestrina many things, but do not keep your promises!”

‘Afterwards, when I died, St. Francis came for my soul, but a black fiend came also, and said to the saint: “Do not take him—do not cheat me thus! His place is below, since he gave the fraudulent counsel, and from that moment until now I have kept close to him. For he who intends to sin is not repentant, and he who is not repentant cannot be absolved: therefore the absolution had no weight and he is damned eternally!”

‘Alas! how I mourned when he spoke thus and seized me, saying: “Aha! you did not think that I could argue so well!” He bore me to the Infernal Judge, Minos cast me down hither, and I go thus clothed in flame and sorrowful at heart.’

Thus Guido ended his tale, and his flame departed, twisting and writhing its tip as it went.

## THE INFERNAL GIANTS

So Dante and Virgil left the evil counsellors and went on their way. They saw the last two pits of Malebolge, which held the sowers of discord and the falsifiers; with some of these Dante had speech, with others he would fain have lingered, but Virgil chid him, saying that such a wish was unworthy of him.

Then at last they had seen all that was in Malebolge, valley of the evil pits, and they left it, mounting up the bank which divided them from the ninth and lowest circle of Hell.

They went silently, and the air was dim—not utterly dark, nor yet wholly clear, so that Dante could see a little way before him. Suddenly he heard the sound of a great horn peal out, louder than any thunder: after the sorrowful rout of Charlemagne, Roland could not have sounded his horn more terribly!

Dante strained his eyes towards the point whence the sound had come, and after a little he seemed to see many lofty towers. So he turned to Virgil and asked:

‘Master! what town is this that I see?’

‘You are yet so far off,’ Virgil replied, ‘that you cannot see rightly, and you err in your imagining.’ Then he took his charge lovingly by the hand, and continued:

‘So that the truth may seem less strange to you

when we arrive there, know that these are not towers, but mighty giants, who stand in the lower pit and show their upper bodies around its rim.'

As when a mist sweeps away, and that which it has hidden takes shape again little by little, so, as the poets came nearer to the brink of the lowest chasm, Dante saw the forms of the great giants more clearly.

'Truly,' he thought, 'Nature did well when she ceased to fashion such vast and brutish creatures!'

The first which the travellers saw clearly was Nimrod, for above the bank his face and shoulders showed, his body down to his waist, and both his arms.

Three mighty men of great stature, standing on each other's shoulders, would have boasted but vainly that they could reach his hair; for from his waist upward he measured full thirty spans.

As the poets approached, Nimrod opened his great mouth, and strange words came out of it.

'Rafel mai amech zabi almi!' he shouted.

But Virgil cried to him:

'Foolish creature! Take your horn and vent your rage with that. See—it hangs round your great chest!' Then he turned to Dante: 'Let us leave him,' he said, 'it is useless to speak to him, for he understands no living tongue, and no man understands his.'

So they turned leftwards along the brink of the chasm, and a bowshot off they found the next giant, who was far larger and more fierce. This one had his right arm bound behind him, and his left in front, and



the chain which tied him thus went three times round his great body.

'This proud creature wished to try his strength against great Jove,' said Virgil. 'Therefore is he punished thus. His name is Ephialtes.'

Dante asked if he might see the huge Briareus.

'Briareus is far beyond,' Virgil replied, 'and he is tied as this one, and is like him, save that he seems more fierce. You shall see Antaeus, who is near to us, and is unfettered. He can speak, and he will lift us down into the depths.'

As he heard Virgil's words, the huge Ephialtes struggled so violently that he seemed like a tower shaken by an earthquake, and only the sight of the giant's chains saved Dante from fainting with fear, so greatly was he terrified. But Virgil led him on, and they reached Antaeus, who was even more huge, for besides his head full five ells of him showed forth out of the pit.

'O you who are so vast and mighty,' Virgil cried to him, 'set us down beneath, on frozen Cocytus. Do not deny us, else must we go and ask it of Tityus or Typhon, so do not curl your lip in scorn, for this man yet lives and can restore your fame on earth.'

So Antaeus stretched out his hands and took Virgil, who in his turn clasped Dante to him. As the giant bent, he seemed to the poets, looking up, like a leaning tower about to fall. It was so dread a moment that Dante trembled once more, and longed to go by any

other way. But they were set down gently in the depth below, and at once Antaeus straightened himself again, as does the mast of a ship at sea when it dips and lifts on the stormy waters.

#### THE FROZEN LAKE OF COCYTUS

Dante and Virgil stood in the dark and deep pit, far below the giant's feet; and they were still looking up at the high wall, when they heard a voice saying:

'Have a care how you pass! Walk not on the heads of your weary, sorrowing brothers!'

Hearing these words, Dante turned, and saw before him, and beneath his feet, a great lake all frozen solid, so that it seemed to be of glass rather than of water. Never did the Austrian Danube, nor the far-distant Don under its cold sky, ever veil themselves with such a thick layer of ice! This was the lake of Cocytus, and even if great mountains had fallen upon it, the ice would not have given so much as a creak.

And in this frozen lake were set many sinners, with only their heads above the ice. Their teeth chattered with the cold, and they wept, but before the tears could fall they were frozen on their lids.

Dante gazed round at this fearful sight, and then went onward with his guide, shuddering in the endless bitter cold. Whether by fate or by chance, as he walked he struck with his foot a spirit's head which

protruded from the ice, and the spirit cried out, weeping:

'Why do you trample on me? Why do you molest me, unless you come to increase my punishment for Montaperti?'

When Dante heard these words he was seized with a sudden suspicion as to who this spirit might be, and he said to Virgil: 'Master! now wait while I speak with this one, and afterwards will I hasten as much as you can desire.'

Virgil stood still, and Dante spoke to the sinner. 'Now who are you, who curse others so bitterly?' he said. 'If you seek fame on earth you will do well to speak, for I am alive and return thither.'

But the head answered him:

'I desire the contrary—forgetfulness on earth. So get you gone, and trouble me no more.'

But Dante, still suspicious, was angered, and he bent and seized the sinner by the hair and threatened him, still demanding his name.

'Even though you pluck out my hair,' the sinner cried, 'I will not answer you!' And he spoke no more, but groaned and cried out in pain. Then another spirit near by called to him:

'What ails you, Bocca? Is it not enough to chatter with your teeth; must you also groan thus? What devil is upon you?'

Then Dante knew that he had suspected rightly, and he turned on the sinner, saying:

'Now, cursed traitor! you do not need to speak, for

to the world above will I bear tidings of you, to your eternal shame!'

For Dante knew that this was Bocca degli Abati, who had acted very treacherously in a certain great battle at Montaperti, near Florence: for at a moment when all hung in the balance he had wounded the standard-bearer of his own side, so that his fellows were put to confusion and routed by their enemies. So for this wretch Dante had naught but scorn, and by this means he learnt that in this frozen lake of Cocytus all traitors were punished, some more grievously than others, for they were set more or less deep in the ice according to the foulness of their treachery.

Then the travellers left Bocca, and a little further on they saw two sinners fixed in the ice so closely that their heads touched each other, and one seemed to be full of hate for his companion, raging at him most fiercely. So Dante said to him:

'Tell me who you were and why you are so full of rage against your fellow. Perchance I can make you some amends, by publishing his offence in the world above.'

Then the angry one raised his head a little, and began his tale:

'Indeed,' he said, 'you ask me to renew a desperate grief, the very thought of which oppresses my heart before I speak of it. But if my words will bring infamy in the world above to this traitor here before me, then will I endure the grief and speak.'

'I know not who you are, nor how you have come hither, but by your speech you seem to be a Florentine. I was Count Ugolino of Pisa, and this was Archbishop Ruggieri of that same city. He induced me to treachery, and therefore am I here; but of that there is no need to speak. To show you how he has injured me I need only tell you of the manner of my death. By his order was I imprisoned in a dread fortress, and my little sons with me. Many moons had I seen wax and wane through the narrow window in our dungeon, when I slept an evil sleep and dreamed most truly of the future. I awoke to find my young sons weeping and asking for bread. My heart foreboded me—and if you weep not at this, at what are you wont to weep? The hour approached at which our food was ever brought to us, but below I heard the sound of a key locking the outlet from the dread tower. By Ruggieri's order no food came that day; for six days more we lived there without food, and between the fourth day and the sixth my sons fell one by one dead at my feet. Then, after two more days, sorrow was merciful, and I died.'

Ugolino ceased to speak, and Dante broke into bitter curses at the town of Pisa, which could condemn young children to such fearful suffering.

But at length the travellers moved forward, and saw other sinners in the floor of ice; and Dante heard the names of some, and their evil deeds, for all here were traitors, and suffered thus in the eternal frost.

LUCIFER AND THE LOWEST CIRCLE  
OF THE TRAITORS

The two poets had now come to that low place in deepest Hell where the souls of the damned were wholly beneath the ice, and showed through like straws set in glass. Some souls were lying prone, some were erect with either head or feet uppermost, others were bent in the shape of a bow; but all were embedded in the floor of ice.

Virgil bade Dante look before them, and he saw a great shape from which a freezing wind seemed to come; it appeared like a windmill seen dimly in the distance through a mist, or when evening falls.

'Behold Lucifer! And here must you arm yourself with strong courage.' So spoke Virgil, and stood aside, so that his charge's sight might not be hindered. Words cannot tell of Dante's terror—his breath failed him, and he stood aghast.

Before him was Lucifer, the emperor of that infernal kingdom, embedded in the ice from his breast downwards. So huge was he that a man would more nearly equal a giant in size than a giant would equal one of his arms. Report has it that when he rebelled against his Maker he was as fair as he is now foul; and if this be true, indeed he may well be the source of all evil.

Dante marvelled when he saw that this loathsome creature had three faces on one head—a face before



and one over each shoulder. The centre face was vermilion in colour, the right was half-white and half-yellow, and the left black as an Ethiop's. Two great wings came out from beneath each face, and never were the sails of a boat so wide as these wings! They had no feathers, but were like those of a bat, and Lucifer flapped them constantly, thus causing three separate winds, so cold that the whole of Cocytus was frozen thereby. Six eyes the monster had and wept, so that tears and foam dripped down from his three chins. In each of his mouths he held a sinner, and champed at them; and these three held the lowest place in Hell.

Dante's guide said to him: 'That spirit in the front-most mouth, who has his head within and whose hanging legs struggle—he who has the hardest punishment, since he is both torn and gnawed—that is Judas Iscariot; and the one within the black mouth is Brutus—see how he struggles, but does not cry out! The other scrawny one is Cassius. But now night descends again upon the world. Let us go, for here we have seen the whole.'

So at Virgil's bidding Dante clasped him round the neck, and at a moment when Lucifer's wings were wide apart and could do no harm, the Latin poet clutched the fiend's shaggy sides, and thus climbed downwards, using the great tufted body as a ladder. But when they were about half-way down the creature's thigh Virgil turned round, and it caused him much labour and difficulty, for the way was hard, and he bore Dante

on his shoulders. Then he seemed to be mounting again, and after a while came out through a crevice in the rock and set down his burden.

'By such stairs,' said he, panting like a weary man, 'must we depart from so much evil.'

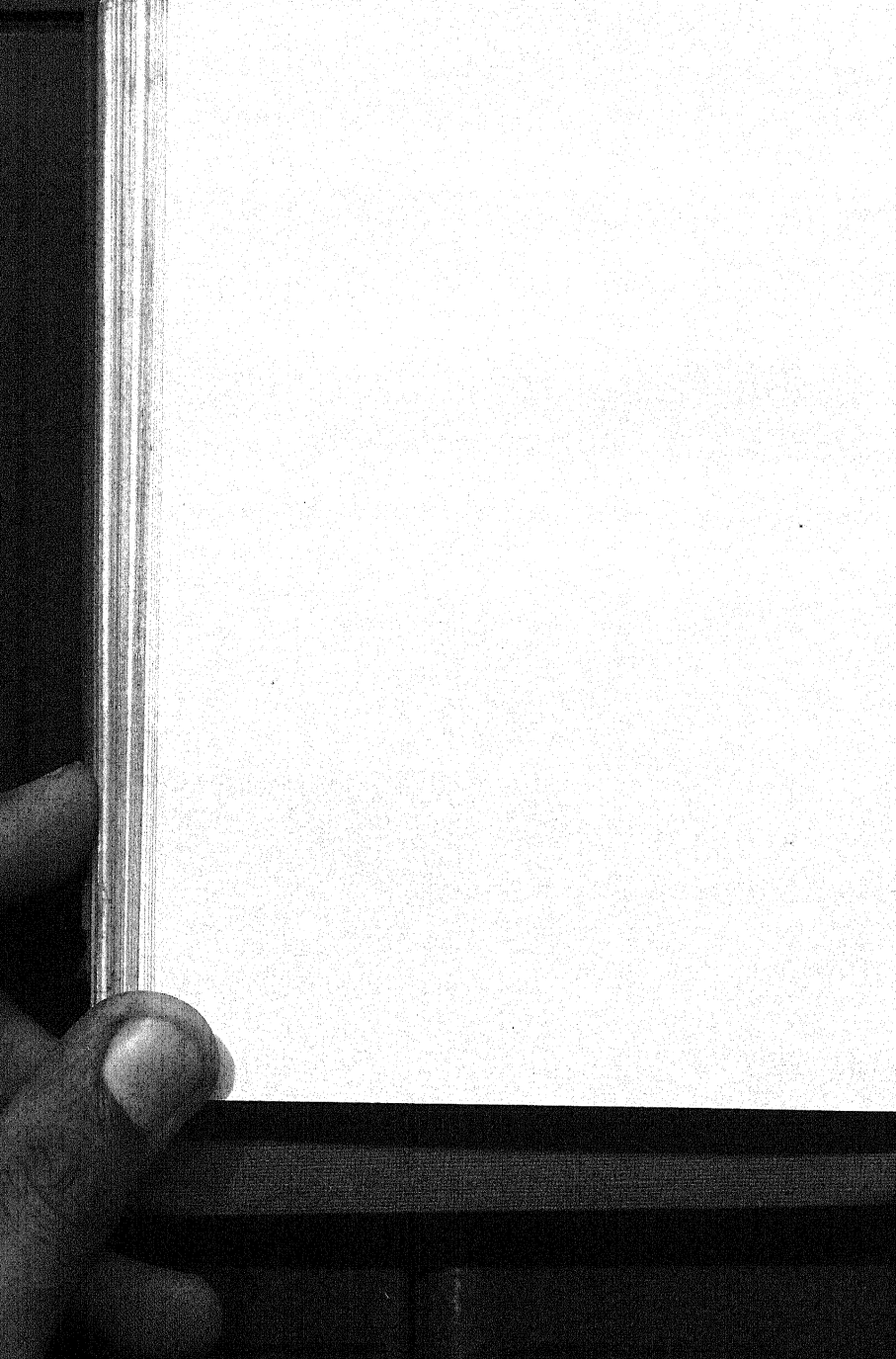
Dante looked upward and was lost in wonder, for above him he saw the legs of that foul creature whose head he had so lately seen; and Virgil increased his wonder, urging him to rise and hasten onwards, for it was already morning.

'Master,' said Dante, 'explain to me, for I am utterly bewildered. Where is the ice? And how comes Lucifer upside down? And how can morning follow evening in so short a time?'

'We have passed,' answered Virgil, 'through the central point of the globe, and now you see the legs of Lucifer and have the morning light above you, when so short a while ago it was night-time, and his head protruded. We are in the other hemisphere: Beelzebub is still fixed as he was before, and here we find the morning, while in the other half of the world it is eve.'

From the dark cave where the poets had rested a small stream issued, which had worn itself a passage through the rock. The path was steep and twisting, but as they spoke together the two climbed upwards, Virgil before, and Dante in his footsteps, till they saw a round opening and the sky above them. So at last they passed through to see the stars again.

# PURGATORY





## THE SHORES OF THE MOUNTAIN OF PURGATORY

THUS did Dante and Virgil leave the infernal abyss, having passed in safety through the terrible first part of their long journey. And now their feet were to follow a fairer path, since they had before them the second eternal realm, the Mount of Purgatory, where the human spirit purges itself of all evil and becomes worthy to rise up to Heaven.

When they came forth from the dead and noisome air of Hell, the fair sapphire tint of dawn in the clear sky restored joy to their weary hearts. Day was near, but the stars were still shining—the planet Venus, the Fishes, and four new stars of greatest brilliance. Dante was standing rejoicing in the pure air, when he saw near him a man of mature years, who seemed worthy of as great reverence as ever son owed to father. His beard was long and touched with white, and the starlight shone so brightly in his face that Dante saw him clearly, as though he were standing in the full sun.

‘Who are ye that have thus fled from the eternal prison?’ he said sternly to the travellers. ‘Who has been a guide and a lamp to you, coming from the deep night which ever blackens the infernal valley? Are

the laws of the abyss thus broken, that, being damned, you come hither to my rocks?'

Virgil signed to Dante that he should kneel in reverence, for this was Cato, guardian of the entrance to the Mount of Purgatory. Then the Roman poet spoke to Cato.

'A lady came down from Heaven,' he said, 'and with her prayers besought me to succour this man. He is yet in life, but when I first came to him he was very near to his last hour; there was no other way to rescue him but to journey along this path. I have shown him all the guilty people, and now I propose that he should see those spirits who are purified under your charge. Virtue from on high aids me in the journey—he goes seeking freedom, may it please you to be gracious to his coming! We break no eternal laws, for he yet lives, and I am of the circle of Limbo. Grant that we may go through your seven kingdoms!'

Cato answered him: 'If a heavenly lady directs you, there is no need to beseech me—it suffices that you ask a passage in her name. Go then, and gird this man with a smooth reed, and bathe his face so that all filth be wiped away, for it is not fitting to go before the first angelic minister with any dimness before the eyes. This isle bears rushes growing on the soft mud all round the base, where the wave beats, and no other plant can live there.

'But return not here,—the sun which is now rising will show you an easier way to ascend the mountain.'

When Cato had spoken, he disappeared, and Dante



looked at his guide, who said: 'Son, follow my steps and let us turn back a little, for by this way the plain slopes down to the shore.'

The dawn was vanquishing the night's last darkness, so that from afar the poets saw the trembling of the sea. They went along the lonely plain, until they came to a place where the dew yet lay, because of the cool air. First, Virgil laid his outstretched hands on the grass, and with the dew gently bathed Dante's upraised face, thus revealing his true colour, which the fumes of Hell had hidden. Then they went on to the lonely shore, and there Virgil girded his charge with a reed, as he had been commanded to do; and even as he plucked the Reed of Humility another sprang up in its place.

They lingered awhile on the shore, awaiting the full dawn of day, and suddenly Dante saw a brilliant point of light, coming over the sea more swiftly than the flight of any bird.

Each moment it grew larger and more bright—on each side of it something white appeared, and after a while another whiteness showed beneath it. Dante turned to question his guide, and for a space Virgil said nothing, as if uncertain. But when the whiteness showed clearly as wings, he cried:

'Kneel! Kneel quickly, and clasp your hands. This is the Angel of God: from now you will see these ministers. See how he scorns all human instruments—he uses neither oars nor sails for the long voyage, but trusts in his wings alone!'

Nearer and nearer the angel came, and shone ever more brightly, so that Dante's eyes could not sustain the gleaming, and he was forced to bend his head earthward. The boat came towards the shore so swiftly and lightly that it did not seem to part the waters, but moved over the very surface of them. In the stern stood the celestial pilot, and blessedness shone out from him; more than a hundred spirits were seated within the boat, and they chanted together the psalm: 'When Israel came out of Egypt.' When they touched the shore the angel made the sign of the Holy Cross, at which all the spirits flung themselves out, and the boat departed swiftly as it had come.

The bright arrows of the sun were shooting forth the day, and the new people on the strand seemed strange to the place, and stood gazing around. After a while they turned towards the poets, saying: 'If you know the way to the mountain, show it to us.'

Virgil told them that he and his companion were strangers even as they; but while he was speaking the spirits gazed at Dante, and saw by his breathing that he was yet alive. They marvelled greatly, pressing close to see, almost forgetting what was their mission in that place. Then one of them recognized Dante, and moved forward to embrace him with great affection, and Dante did the like to him. Three times the Florentine poet flung his arms round the spirit before him, and each time he clasped the empty air; and thus he learnt that, save in outward show, the spirits had no bodily existence.

This shade was Casella, a musician, who on earth had been Dante's friend; and Dante spoke to him, imploring him: 'Casella, if a new manner of life has not taken your skill from you, sing to me a little, and calm my soul, which is much wearied with the journey hither.'

Then Casella began to sing most sweetly a poem of Dante's own composing: 'Love, that in my mind discourseth to me.' As he sang, Virgil and his charge and the spirits who were with them were so enraptured that they stood listening, and thought of naught else but the music.

All were thus intent upon the song, when the venerable Cato came to them, crying:

'What negligence is this, ye laggard spirits? Hasten to the mount, to purge away those sins which hide God from you!'

When he had spoken Casella ceased his singing, and all the spirits ran towards the mountain, as if they had no other thought than to reach it speedily. Nor did the two travellers move more slowly.

#### DANTE MEETS MANFRED AND BELACQUA IN ANTE-PURGATORY

After Cato's reproach the poets set their faces towards the great mountain which rose so high out of the sea. The new-risen sun flamed red behind them,

and Dante's form broke its light, so that his shadow was cast on the ground before. Virgil's shadow was not to be seen, and Dante turned in fear, thinking that he had been forsaken by his kindly guide. But Virgil was by his side, and comforted him.

'Why do you distrust me?' he said. 'Well should you know that I am with you, and would not leave you. That body of mine which once cast a shadow lies buried in fair Italy, and this phantom form that here I bear breaks not the sun's rays.'

As he was speaking the two had gone onwards, and had reached the foot of the mountain. They looked up and saw the cliff to be so steep that vainly would a man have sought to climb it.

Virgil stayed his steps, and said questioningly: 'Now who can tell us on which side the cliff slopes down, so that he who has not wings may scale it?'

As he spoke Dante saw a troop of spirits coming towards them on the left hand, but they came so slowly that they scarce seemed to move.

'Look, master!' he cried; 'if of yourself you do not know the way, here come some who may give us counsel.' So the two travellers went gladly towards the spirits, and Virgil called to them.

'O ye whose end was happy,' he began, 'O well-chosen spirits, by that peace which you hope to attain, tell us where the mountain slopes down, so that a man may climb upwards!'

The leader of the band moved forward, and those in front followed him, but when they saw the shadow

Dante cast they halted, and drew back a little; and those who came after them did the like, knowing not why—as sheep coming forth from the pen do as the foremost one does, and if she stands, crowd up close to her, and stand silly and quiet, without a reason.

But Virgil spoke. 'Before you question me,' he said, 'I will tell you what you would ask. This man has still his human form, and therefore he breaks the sun's light thus. Wonder not at it, for Heaven has ordained our journey.'

Then the spirits pointed the way, and cried out: 'Turn, and go before us.' And one of them said to Dante: 'Whoever you may be, look if ever you did see me on earth.' So Dante gazed fixedly at him—he was golden of hair, fair, and of gentle aspect, but the Florentine poet could not recognize him.

The spirit smiled, and showed Dante a great scar on his breast and said that he was Manfred, son of Frederick, the great emperor.

'Vile were my sins,' he said, 'but the Infinite Goodness has such wide arms that it accepts all who turn to it.' Much more he said, telling Dante that all who died excommunicated by the Church must needs stay on this outer shore of Purgatory thirty times as long as on earth they had been outside the fold, unless many holy prayers were offered for them. Manfred himself was of this band of excommunicates, therefore he begged Dante to tell his fair daughter on earth to pray for him.

As Manfred was speaking the travellers had gone on in company with the band of spirits, and they came to a place where all cried out: 'Here is what you seek.'

There was an opening in the cliff above them, so narrow that often a peasant fills a hedge-gap wider than this with a mere forkful of thorns; but Virgil mounted up, and Dante after him, and they left the spirits on the strand below. The rock was cleft and overhung on each side, and the path was so steep that to climb it they needed to use hands as well as feet.

But at last they reached the summit of the cliff, and came out on an open hillside, so bare that Dante said:

'Master, which way shall we now take?'

'Let us mount always,' answered Virgil, 'until some guide appears to us who is wise in the ways of this mountain.'

They went on climbing upwards, but the hill was so high and steep that they could not see the summit; so that Dante said in weariness: 'Master, if you do not wait for me I shall remain behind alone.'

Virgil encouraged him and said: 'My son, urge yourself as far as that terrace above us, which circles all the mountain on this side.'

Thither they went and sat down to rest, their faces towards the east whence they had come. And while they rested they had much speech together, Virgil explaining to Dante how the Mountain of Purgatory was formed, and how at the beginning the ascent was



hard and toilsome, but the more a man climbed the easier it became.

'Therefore,' he said, 'when the ascent seems as pleasant and easy to you as it is to go downstream in a boat, then will you be at the end of the way, and there you may rest your weariness.'

As he finished speaking, a voice said behind them: 'Perchance before that you will have need to rest.'

Both the poets turned and saw on their left a great rock, which they had not noticed before. They rose and went towards it, and saw many people there, lounging in its shade, seeming like men who settle themselves down from laziness. One was sitting embracing his knees, with his head drooping down between them.

'My master,' cried Dante, 'look at that one there, who seems more lazy than if sloth were his very sister!'

At this the spirit looked up, raising his head slowly from his knees, and said:

'Mount upward, then, since you are so energetic!'

Then Dante knew him, and smiled at his words and at his lazy movements. 'Belacqua,' he said, 'tell me, why are you seated thus? Do you await escort, or have you but resumed your wonted habit?' For he had known this spirit on earth as a man famed for his sloth.

Belacqua answered: 'Brother, of what avail is it to ascend? God's angel that sits at the gate would not yet allow me to go to the purifying torments, for as in life we delayed our repentance, so all of us here must

delay our ascent, unless we are helped by prayers from the living.'

Dante would have stayed longer, but Virgil urged him on, saying: 'Come now, for already it is noon.'

#### BUONCONTE OF MONTEFELTRO, AND PIA

So the poets went on upwards, meeting many groups of spirits as they went. All marvelled at the sight of Dante's shadow, and ever and again he had to assure them that he was indeed still in life.

One group the travellers saw, coming across the mountain slope, and chanting the *Miserere* as they came. They approached Dante, crying:

'O soul that bear your mortal body heavenwards, stay awhile and see if you know any one among us, that you may bear his tidings back to the world. All of us were slain by violence, and we were sinners up to our last hour, but then repented, and God's grace placed us here. Stay a moment—why will you not stop?'

But Virgil had bidden Dante not to cease from mounting while he spoke with them, so as he went he said:

'However much I gaze in your faces, none can I remember. But if I may do aught for you, speak on, and I will do it for the sake of that peace which I go seeking.'

Many spoke to him eagerly, and told their tales. One named himself Buonconte of Montefeltro, and Dante knew him by report as a mighty soldier, and the son of that Guido who was punished below as a giver of evil counsel. So he asked the spirit:

'How chanced it that after Campaldino's battle none ever knew your burial-place?'

'Sore wounded in the throat,' Buonconte replied, 'I fled across the plain, and reached that point where the stream Archiano flows into the River Arno. There I fell, and sinner though I was, I called on Mary with my last breath—and there I died. God's angel took my spirit, but a fiend came up from Hell, and cried: "O you from Heaven, why do you rob me? You bear hence this man's soul, for the sake of one repenting tear by which he won salvation. But I will not deal gently with the earthly part of him!"'

'Therefore none found my body, for as that day was spent, mist closed down over all the valley, and then the heavy air was turned to water. The rain-swollen streams rushed down in torrents to the mighty river, and the raging waters swept my body with them, till the shingles of the river bed covered it.'

Thus Buonconte told his tale, and after him another spirit spoke these sad and gentle words:

'Alas! When you return to earth remember me, who am La Pia. In Siena was I born, and in Maremma died—well does he know it who wedded me with his ring.' She said no more, but Dante knew her to be Pia Tolomei, the innocent wife of a man who had put her

to death in his castle in the Maremma because he wished to wed another.

And many more spirits spoke to Dante, beseeching him to bear report of them to earth. They thronged around him, and he, turning his face now here, now there, freed himself of them by promises, for their one hope was that those on earth should pray for them, and thus hasten their time of purification.

Then Virgil urged Dante onwards, promising that all which he had seen should be explained to him by his lady, Beatrice, whom he would see smiling and blessed on the summit of the mount. Then, full of joy, Dante said: 'My master, go we then more speedily, for already I am less weary than I was, and see! the hillside casts a shadow: eve approaches.'

Virgil replied: 'We will go as far as we may with this day's light, but the sun must return again to the heavens ere we reach the heights.'

#### THE TRAVELLERS MEET SORDELLO

So they went onward, and after a while saw before them one solitary spirit, proud and noble of bearing, who did not speak, but only watched them, as a couching lion watches.

Virgil approached, asking for guidance in the ascent, but had no reply, for in answer the spirit questioned them as to whence they came, and how.

'In Mantua . . .' Virgil began, but said no more, for the spirit sprang joyfully towards him, saying: 'O Mantuan, I am Sordello of your city!' and the two embraced each other. Dante wept with pride and sorrow, thinking that his Italy was rent with wars and factions, and that fellow-citizens no longer greeted each other thus, for the bare love of their common native city, and as he watched the two noble Mantuans of old time he cursed his country's evil condition most bitterly.

The spirit who had greeted Virgil was Sordello, famous as a poet; one who had wandered much, and who wrote in the fair tongue of Provence, though he had been born in Italy.

When the two Mantuans' glad greetings had been many times repeated, Sordello drew back and asked the other: 'Who are you?' He was answered: 'Ere Christ came down to earth, I died. I am Virgil, and I lost Heaven by no sin, but only because I did not know the True Faith.'

For a while Sordello stood motionless, and seemed like one who almost doubts, so great was his wonder. Then he bent down in reverence, and again embraced Virgil—this time round the knees.

'O glory of the Romans,' he said, 'you who in your great poem showed forth that which our tongue could do, you who are the eternal pride of my native city—what grace has shown you to me? If I am worthy to hear you speak, tell me whether you come from Hell, and from what circle.'

Virgil answered him: 'Below in the infernal valley there is a place that is not sad with torments, but only with shadows; where there is no weeping, but only sighs. There dwell I, with the innocent babes whom Death cut off before they were baptized, and with those who lived before Christ came down, and who thus worshipped not rightly, and only of this were we guilty. But if you can, tell us how we may go most quickly to the place where the purifying begins.'

'For as far as I am allowed to go I place myself beside you as your guide,' Sordello answered, 'since in this part of the mountain I may go where I will. But see now how the evening falls! We cannot ascend at night-time, so we should now find some fair resting-place. Here on the right there are souls set apart; if you consent I will lead you thither, for you will have much delight in seeing them.'

Virgil begged him to lead them where he would, so they went a short way forward, and saw a place where the mountain-side was hollowed out into the shape of a valley.

'There will we go,' Sordello said, 'and there await the new day.'

#### THE VALLEY OF THE PRINCES

A little winding path led the travellers and their guide to the edge of the vale. There within were grass and flowers so fair and bright that gold and fine



silver, scarlet dyes and white, Indian wood, and fresh emerald at the moment of its splitting, would all be surpassed in colour by them. And not only had Nature painted brilliant hues in that place, but she had also made the thousand scents that were there into one sweet fragrance.

On the grass in that valley the travellers saw many souls seated, singing the *Salve Regina*: they could not be seen from the outside, as they were hidden by the valley's rim.

'Ask me not yet to guide you down there,' Sordello said, 'for, while still a little sunlight remains, you will see and know them better from this slope than by going down among them.'

So he pointed out and named to the travellers the spirits of many princes and rulers, who on earth had been negligent of their high office, and who here had to expiate their negligence by delaying in this vale, when they would fain ascend the mountain. Rudolph the Emperor he named, Philip of France and Henry of Navarre, Charles of Anjou, Henry III of England, and many more; father and son sitting together, and former enemies comforting each other.

But the fair sunset hour had fallen, and as the poets watched the princes they saw one rise to his feet and stretch his hands heavenward, beginning the evening hymn. The others joined in singing most sweetly, and when they had ended they stood as if expectant, looking upward. As they waited, two angels came from above, each with a flaming sword broken at the

point. Their garments were of the colour of Hope—green as tender young leaves, and fanned by green wings. One came and stood on the bank a little above the travellers, and the other took up his place on the further bank, so that the princes were between them.

‘Both came from Mary’s bosom,’ said Sordello, ‘as guardians of the valley against the serpent which will shortly come. Let us now go down among the noble shades; we will speak with them, and they will have great joy of it.’

So they descended, and Dante spoke with some of those rulers whom he had known on earth, and gave them news of their lands, and they begged him to ask prayers for them on earth—prayers that should rise to where the innocent are heard.

As the travellers moved about and spoke with the spirits, Sordello drew Virgil to him, saying:

‘See! there is our enemy.’ And he pointed with his finger. Dante looked, and saw a little snake on the rim of the valley, coming down among the grass and flowers, and ever and again turning its head to lick itself as a beast does. But then he saw the angel guardians in flight, their green wings sweeping through the air; the serpent heard them and fled, and the angels wheeled back to their former places.

More rulers Dante then spoke with, but the moon’s aurora was already whitening the sky, and two hours of the night were past. The travellers had seated themselves on the ground, and Dante, whose human

frame needed rest, was overcome by sleep. So he sank down upon the grass, and as he slept he dreamed.

#### THE TRAVELLERS ENTER THE TRUE PURGATORY

In his dream Dante seemed to see a golden-pinioned eagle poised in the sky. It circled awhile, then, swift and terrible as lightning, swooped down and carried Dante aloft to a circle of fire in the heavens, and in his dream the poet felt the scorching of the fire, and it awoke him.

As soon as sleep had left his eyes he started up, looked round, and grew pale with wonder, for he was no longer in the valley with Sordello and the princes, but in a place looking out over the sea, with only Virgil for company, and the sun was more than two hours high.

'Fear not,' said Virgil. 'At dawn, before the day had risen, while you still slept in that flower-strewn valley beneath us, a holy lady came, and said: "I am Lucy—let me take up this man who sleeps, for I would help him on his way." Sordello and the other noble ones remained; she bore you upward as the day grew clear, and I followed after. Here she placed you, and pointed to me the way we now must take; then, as you awakened, she departed.

'All that we have yet seen since we left the infernal valley has been Ante-Purgatory, but now we are come

to the true Purgatory. Look up yonder—there are its walls, and that cleft in them is the entrance.'

So Dante was reassured, and followed his guide to that point where the wall above them seemed divided. There he saw a gate, and below it three steps: the first of smooth white marble, polished so that it was mirror-like; the second of darkest purple stone, rough to the eye and with two cracks running over it in the form of a cross; while the third was of porphyry, so crimson red that it seemed like blood. Seated on the diamond threshold was the guardian of the gate, the angel of God; and he had such glory in his face that Dante could not bear to look on it. He was robed in ash grey, and in his hand he held a naked sword, which reflected the bright rays dazzlingly.

'What would you?' the angel said to the travellers. Virgil told him of their journey, and how it was willed in Heaven; and then the guardian summoned them to mount the steps, and Virgil bade his charge ask most humbly that the bolt of the gate should be loosed. So Dante flung himself at the angel's feet, imploring entrance.

Then the gatekeeper leaned forward, and with the point of his sword traced the letter P seven times on Dante's forehead, and bade him wash the wounds one by one, and thus efface them, as he ascended by the purifying terraces. For the Mount of Purgatory was ringed by seven successive terraces, and on each a different sin was purged, and the P's were signs of the seven deadly sins, from all trace of which Dante was

to purify himself before he was fitted to ascend to Heaven, and as he passed through each terrace one P would disappear.

Then from beneath his garment the angel drew out two keys, one of gold, and one of silver, and he unlocked the gate, first with the silver, and then with the golden key. These were the keys of Judgment and Absolution.

'I hold them from St. Peter,' the angel said, 'and he bade me open most freely, when I was humbly implored to do so.'

Then he opened the door and said: 'Enter, but know that whosoever looks behind him, returns outside again.' The gate-hinges creaked loudly on their sockets, and the poets entered. Dante listened, and the first sound he heard from within was the singing of the psalm *Te Deum Laudamus*, accompanied by sweet music, so that at times the words were lost among the notes. Then he heard the gate clang shut behind him, but remembering the angel's words, he looked not back.

The poets found themselves in a narrow passage which mounted through the cleft rock, and on each side the rock walls seemed to move, now backwards, now forwards, surging like the waves of the sea.

'Here must we be skilful,' said Virgil, 'and keep close to the receding side, whichever it may be.'

This made their strange path so arduous, and their steps so slow, that the sun was high before they reached the summit of the narrow passage. Then

they came on to an open place on the mountain-side, and stood still, for Dante was weary and his guide was uncertain of the way. The place where they stood was level and solitary, bordered as far as their eyes could see by a high bank of pure white marble, carved all round with fairest sculptures, so lifelike that they put Nature herself to shame.

Dante looked at those in front of him, but Virgil urged him to examine them in detail, so he moved round and gazed upon them all.

#### THE TERRACE WHERE PRIDE IS PURIFIED

On this terrace were purified sins of pride, so among the fair images Dante saw many sculptures which taught lessons of humility—pride's opposite. First he saw the Angel Gabriel, pictured so vividly that the image seemed to be alive. With him was Mary, to whom he brought the joyful tidings, and she seemed to be saying: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'

And Dante saw David also figured there, as he danced in humility before the Ark, and the images of many other men and women of ancient time.

While he was still gazing, Virgil said to him: 'See, here are many people, moving slowly—they will show us the way to mount higher.'

Dante turned, ever eager to look upon new things,



and he saw strange shapes coming towards him, and could not recognize them for human forms. But Virgil bade him look again, and then he saw that these were indeed spirits, bowed down under great rocks of terrible weight, so that they seemed like those stone figures which are sometimes sculptured crouching under a heavy roof, as if to support it.

These spirits went thus bowed down because on earth they had been proud and scornful, and were now purging their sin in attitudes of utmost humbleness. They seemed weary and wept, but yet as they went they sang the *Paternoster*, and seemed intent on humbling themselves still more, that they might the more speedily ascend to bliss.

Virgil called to them, and said: 'So may you the sooner be freed of your burden, show us which way leads the most quickly upwards, and if there be more than one way, which is the least steep? For he who is here with me can move but slowly, since he is yet clothed with human flesh.'

One among the crowd answered: 'Come with us towards the right, and you shall find the pass.' And he began to tell his story—how he had come of a great and ancient family, famed for its gallant deeds, and how his pride of race had made him arrogant, so that he thought naught of other men.

As this spirit spoke, Dante bent down to listen, and another among the band, by twisting himself beneath the stone which bowed him down, saw Dante's face and called out, though he could scarce look up, because

of the weight upon his neck. But Dante knew him, and said:

'Were you not Oderisi of Gubbio, famed in the art of illumination?'

'Brother,' the spirit answered, 'truly I was too proud of that art of mine, and here do I expiate my pride. How empty are all human powers! All earthly fame is naught but a breath of wind, so quickly does it pass, and so quickly does one great name succeed another. Cimabue once thought to hold the field in painting, but now Giotto rules, and the fame of the first is obscured. So is it with the other arts—and not the arts alone; for all Tuscany rang with the fame of a great soldier who crawls along this road before me, and now he is scarce mentioned even in his native Siena. Human fame is but as grass, which comes and goes.'

The spirit spoke yet more in praise of humility, and told Dante the tales of others who were on this terrace, heavily weighed down; until Virgil urged on his charge to greater speed.

So Dante, who had been bending to listen to Oderisi's words, straightened his back again and moved on in the footsteps of his guide. Then Virgil said:

'Look downwards as you go, and ease the way by gazing at the pavement beneath your feet.'

So Dante looked down, and pictured on the ground he saw many images of pride's punishment, placed there as a lesson to the spirits who went purging themselves of this same offence.

Satan was there, who was created fairer than any other, and cast down for his exceeding pride; Niobe, who gloried in her many children; Arachne, already half-turned to a spider, weeping over her torn web; proud Troy, shown all in ashes and in ruins, base and vile; and many more were figured there.

So intent was Dante on these scenes that he had gone far along the mountain-side when Virgil said:

'Lift up your head—see! here an angel comes towards us. Meet him with reverence, so that he may send us upwards.'

Then Dante saw the fair Angel of Humility coming towards them, clothed in white. He opened his arms and said: 'Come! the stairs are near, and easily may you now mount.' Then he led the travellers to where the rock was cleft, and spoke fair words to them, and beat his wings upon Dante's forehead. The poets set their faces towards the steps, and as they went they heard voices singing most sweetly: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'

Truly were these journeys from terrace to terrace different from the like journeys in Hell, for there Virgil and Dante had entered each circle to the sound of bitter wailing, but here to the sound of sweet songs!

As they mounted, Dante said:

'Master, what heavy thing has been lifted from me, for now I seem to feel scarce any weariness?'

Virgil replied: 'When those P's which still remain on your brow shall be wiped out, then not only will you

feel no weariness, but your feet will long to mount upwards.'

At first Dante was uncertain of his guide's meaning, but he lifted his hand and felt his forehead, and lo! he found only six of the seven signs which had been cut thereon, for one had been brushed away by the angel's wing. Seeing his wonder, Virgil smiled.

#### THE TERRACE OF THE ENVIOUS

The travellers came out at the summit of the stairway, and found an open place like that which they had seen on the first terrace, but narrower and more sharply curved. It was bare and shadowless, with no sign of living thing, so that Virgil looked round vainly for guidance.

'If we await people who can tell us the road,' he said, 'I fear we may delay too much.' Then he looked up at the sun, and continued: 'Thou, sweet light, that givest warmth to the world—do thou lead us and be our guide!'

So they went westward in the sun's beams, and had gone a distance that on earth would be called a mile, when they heard unseen spirits flying past through the air, chanting sweet songs in praise of charity as they went.

'What are these voices, master?' Dante asked.

'On this terrace is envy purged away,' Virgil replied,

'and therefore do you hear the praise of its contrary virtue. But look closely at the bank which rims the terrace, and you will see spirits seated along it.'

So Dante looked more carefully than hitherto, and he saw spirits sitting, draped in cloaks so near the colour of the stone that they had been hidden from him before. After a little he heard them crying imploringly: 'Mary, pray for us! Michael, Peter, and all the saints, pray for us!'

And Dante wept, for there is no man on earth so hardened that he would not weep at such a sight. Each spirit wore a cloak of coarse haircloth, and they leant shoulder to shoulder against the bank, even as blind beggars sit and ask for alms. And as the blind see not the sun, so these shades saw it not, for each had his eyelids sewn together with iron wire.

Dante felt that he did them wrong, to gaze at them thus when they could not see, so he spoke to them.

'O spirits who are certain of beholding the light above,' he said, 'so may grace purge your sins—tell me if there be any one among you who was Italian.'

The answer came from one among the group. 'O brother,' it said, 'all here are citizens of one True City: mean you not to ask for one who, as a pilgrim, lived in Italy?'

Dante turned to that spirit which had spoken and begged to know its name and history.

'I was Sapia of Siena,' he was answered, 'and here in sorrow do I cleanse my sinful life. So envious was I of my fellow-citizens, that I, prayed God for their

defeat in battle; and when they were flying in a bitter rout, I dared to lift my bold face, and cry: "Now, God, I fear Thee no more, for I have all my desire!" But at my last hour I longed for peace with Heaven—yet it would scarce have availed, had not prayers been offered up for me.'

Then many other spirits of the envious spoke with Dante, and named themselves, and told their tales. All begged for prayers from the living, that their time of purgation might be made more brief.

After some while the poets passed on, journeying alone. Suddenly they heard a voice cleaving the air like lightning, crying: 'Every one that findeth me shall slay me,' and then the voice of Cain passed away swiftly as it had come, like a breaking peal of thunder. Other voices the poets heard, calling out the punishments of envy, until all had passed, and the air was quiet again.

'So may men learn,' said Virgil; 'for the heavens call, and circle around in their beauty, but the human eye looks ever down to earth.'

Then the travellers went onward, for it was late afternoon, and the rays of the westering sun struck full on their faces. Suddenly Dante felt a splendour weighing down his brow, so that he raised his hands, shading his eyes from the excess of light. But still it was more dazzling than he could bear, and he asked:

'Master, what is it that comes towards us, from which I cannot screen my sight?'

'Do not wonder at it,' Virgil replied, 'if you cannot



yet endure the shining of the heavenly messengers—soon it shall be easy for you. This is the Angel of Charity, who comes to bid us ascend.'

Then the messenger said in a joyful voice: 'Enter here! This stairway is far less steep than those before.' So they mounted, and heard voices chanting: 'Blessed are the merciful,' and also, 'Rejoice, thou that overcomest.'

As they went Dante questioned his guide as to many things which he had seen, and to some of his questions Virgil gave answer, but said that when they came to Beatrice she would fully free him from his doubts.

'Only strive onwards,' he said, 'so that the other five marks on your forehead be the sooner spent, for two are gone already.'

#### THE POETS PASS THROUGH THE SMOKY TERRACE OF ANGER, AND THEN SEE THE SLOTHFUL

So the poets reached the third terrace, and Dante was about to speak, when he seemed to be caught up into a vision of ecstasy, and saw Forgiveness pictured forth in many forms: Christ's mother in the temple who forgave her Son; St. Stephen praying for those who stoned him, and many more.

After a while Dante seemed to awake, and Virgil asked him: 'What ails you? You have come more

than half a league with your eyes veiled, and with uncertain steps, like one overcome by sleep or wine.'

Dante began to tell of his vision, but Virgil checked him, saying: 'Indeed, I know it already; I asked but to give strength to your feet, for now must we hasten onwards. What you saw was meant to urge you to open your heart to the Waters of Peace, which flow from the Eternal Fountain.'

So they went onwards through the evening, straining their eyes forward into the rays of the setting sun, when little by little a smoke dark as night rolled up towards them, blotting out their sight and all pure air. No gloom of Hell beneath the cloud-darkened, starless sky had been so thick a veil, nor had seemed so harsh as that smoke, so that Dante was forced to close his eyes. Then Virgil came near to him and offered his shoulder, saying: 'See that you are not cut off from me.' So he went onwards through the foul and bitter air, leading Dante as a blind man is led.

As they walked voices came to their ears, praying to the Lamb of God for peace and mercy. Virgil told his charge that these were spirits, purifying themselves from the sin of anger.

'Now who are you,' cried a voice, 'that go cleaving our smoke and speaking as if you were still in life?'

Dante answered: 'O spirit that cleanse yourself so that you may return fair to Him who made you, follow me, and I will talk with you.'

'I will follow you as far as I may,' the voice replied,

'and though the smoke hinders our sight, hearing shall keep us together.'

So Dante began: 'With my body which shall perish do I mount upward, and have come hither through the bitterness of Hell. Do not hide from me who you were, and tell me also if this is the true path towards the stairway.'

The spirit answered that they were treading the right path, and that he was Mark the Lombard, whom Dante knew to have been a courtier of great renown. They had much talk together of high and noble things, and also of the sorrowful state of Italy, torn with factions and bitter wars. And Mark said: 'Truly, Rome was wont to have two rulers, Pope and Emperor: one for God and one of the world. But the Pope now wills to rule the world as well, and much sorrow comes therefrom.' More he said, and Dante echoed his judgments; but after a while Mark stayed his steps, saying: 'No further can I come; there beyond you is a light gleaming through the smoke—it is the angel, and as yet I may not see him.' So he turned back and left them.

But Virgil and Dante went onwards, and as through a thinning mountain mist the sun gleams faint at first, so they saw the setting sun gleam dimly as they came towards the end of the smoke. As they left it, once more Dante was lost in a vision, and this time he seemed to see many deeds of wrath. But as sleep is broken when a bright light strikes on the sleeper's eyes, so the vision faded as a shining beam smote upon

Dante's face, and he looked, but could see nothing for the splendour. But he heard a voice which said: 'Here is the ascent.' And Virgil said:

'It is the Angel of Peace, who guides us ere we ask for guidance. We must hasten, for night falls, and at night we cannot mount upwards.'

So they turned to the stairway, and as they went Dante felt the fanning stroke of a wing upon his face, and a voice said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'

The poets pressed on upwards, and as they gained the new terrace Dante asked what offence was purified there. 'Sloth is purged here,' Virgil replied, 'that sin which knows where good lies, and does not seek it.' They sat down to rest, and Virgil taught Dante much of the nature of love, and how sin is caused; and when he had done speaking the moon was high in the heavens, and it was near midnight.

Dante was drowsy, and was almost falling asleep, when a band of spirits came rushing past them, so eager to purge themselves of sloth that they could not stop to answer Virgil's questioning.

'Haste! Haste!' they cried, and one called back to the travellers: 'Follow us, and you will find the ascent. Forgive us if we stay not—we are full of zeal to purify ourselves.' Then he sped after his companions.

When they were all lost to sight, Dante began to ponder over what he had seen. So many thoughts came to him that he was wearied; his thoughts turned swiftly into dreams, and he slept.

DANTE SPEAKS WITH SOME WHO ARE PURGING  
THEMSELVES OF AVARICE

At the chilliest morning hour before the dawn a dream came to Dante, and he seemed to see a hideous creature, a stuttering woman, squint of eye and lame of foot, with maimed hands and a sallow countenance. He gazed upon her, and under his gaze she seemed to change and become most fair, as straight of limb and rosy of cheek as a lover could wish. Then she began to sing most winningly.

'I am that fair Siren,' she sang, 'who enchants mariners in mid-ocean, so sweet is my music to the ear. Ulysses did I turn from his path; he who once hearkens to me rarely leaves me, so full am I of joy and charm.'

She had scarcely ceased her singing, when a holy lady appeared to put the creature to confusion. This blessed one seemed angry, and cried: 'Virgil, Virgil! who is this?' Then Virgil came quickly and rent the Siren's clothes, and Dante woke.

As he woke he turned his head, and Virgil was beside him, saying: 'At least three times have I called you! Rise now, and hasten, so that we may find the stair to mount higher.'

It was now full morning, and Dante, with his head bent in thought, was following his guide along the way, when he heard: 'Come, here is the passage!' spoken in a gentle voice. The angel who spoke had wings

wide as a swan's, and he fanned the travellers, saying meanwhile: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

Then the poets began to climb upwards, but Dante was still troubled at heart by the thought of his dream, until Virgil consoled him, and bade him raise his eyes upwards, saying that when they had mounted higher Dante would be purified in spirit and free from all such evil visions. So they went forward up through the cleft rock, and reached the fifth terrace.

There they saw many souls lying prone upon the ground, face downwards, sighing and weeping bitterly. Virgil asked them for guidance on the way, and one among them answered that the path lay to the right hand.

Then Dante spoke. 'O spirit who purify yourself by your own tears,' he said, 'tell me who you were, and why your back is thus turned upwards; and if I can do aught for you in the world to which I return, willingly will I do it.'

The spirit answered him: 'I will tell you of our punishment, but first I would have you know that I was Pope Adrian V, and thus one of St. Peter's successors, though I held the Great Keys for little more than a month. I knew that none could mount higher in the world than I had, but even in that office my heart was not at rest. So, late in life, I turned my thoughts to Heaven; till then I had had an avaricious spirit, wholly parted from God, therefore here do I purify myself of that offence. For on this terrace



avarice is purged away, and even as in life our eyes were fixed on worldly things and looked not upward, so here must we gaze at the earth.'

Dante, moved by reverence for the great papal office, was bending downwards as he listened. But Adrian chid him, and said:

'Raise yourself up, my brother: I was but a fellow-servant with you, and with all others, of one Power. But now get you gone, for my speech with you hinders my weeping, and by weeping must I purify myself ere I can mount higher.'

Dante would fain have asked him more, but did as he was desired to do and left him; then moved on in Virgil's footsteps, all intent on the weeping spirits which they passed. One more among them he spoke with: Hugh Capet, King of France, who bewailed his avarice on earth, and rehearsed to Dante the sorrows caused to much of Europe by the sins of his own royal dynasty. Charles of Anjou he spoke of, Charles of Valois and Charles the Lame, Philip of Valois, and many more, all descended from his stock.

'Alas!' he said, 'what more can avarice do to my race, since it has won such power over us all?' Then he told Dante how, at evening, the spirits on that terrace rehearsed to each other famous examples of avarice, as a warning; and how by day they sang of justice and generosity, as a pattern.

Then Dante and Virgil left this ancestor of the royal line of France, and passed upward in search of the next stairway to lead them higher.

## THE MEETING WITH STATIUS

As the travellers went hastening onwards, suddenly the mountain shook most violently, as if it were about to fall; and then on all sides a great shout went up, so that Dante trembled, as if in fear of death. But Virgil came nearer to him, saying: 'Fear not, for I am guiding you.'

Then the words of the shout became clear, for those spirits near to Dante were crying: 'Glory be to God on high!' The poets stood motionless until the cry had ended, and the quaking of the mountain had ceased, and then went on their way again. Dante longed greatly to know the reason of it all, for he could see no cause around him; all seemed as it had been before; but he did not wish to delay his guide by questions, for Virgil was hastening onwards, so he followed, still burning with the desire to understand. He was soon to know, for a spirit was coming along the way behind them, although they did not see it until it spoke.

'May God give you peace, my brothers,' it said. The poets quickly turned, and Virgil gave back the greeting. 'How comes it,' said the spirit, 'if you are souls not yet fit for blessedness, that ye have come so far without a guide?'

Virgil bade him look at Dante, and see how he was yet alive. Then he told of Dante's journey, and how he himself had been summoned through the wide jaws of Hell to guide him. 'But tell us, if you can,' he

continued, 'why did the mountain shake, and why did such a great cry go up?' Dante rejoiced at the question, which he himself had longed to ask.

'No earthly change affects this holy mountain,' replied the spirit. 'It was no earthquake such as you may know. But when some soul is cleansed enough, so that it may rise and climb higher, then the mountain shakes. I have lain here and suffered torment for more than five hundred years, but now am I fit to ascend to a better place, and therefore the ground quaked, and the spirits on the mount gave praise to God.'

Virgil thanked him, and asked if they might know his earthly name.

'On earth I was a poet,' he replied; 'men called me Statius. I sang of Thebes and of the great Achilles, but the seed and inspiration of my poetic fire I drew from the noble Aeneid; from it I learnt my art and without it I had been as nothing. Could I but have lived on earth with Virgil, and seen him, I would endure another year of Purgatory!'

Dante's guide turned to him with a sign that he should be silent, but much as Dante desired to obey, he could not prevent a smile from coming to his lips.

Statius had seen it, and stared attentively at him, and then asked what the smile had meant.

Dante stood confused, and did not answer, but at last Virgil told him he might speak. So he began: 'O spirit of old time, perhaps you wonder at my

smile, but you will wonder more at what I have to tell. He who is with me here and guides me, is that same Virgil who inspired your verse. Therefore I smiled when you spoke of him, for I knew you did not dream of his presence here.'

When he heard this, Statius flung himself down to embrace the knees of Dante's guide, but Virgil said: 'Brother, rise up! for you are but a shade, and it is a shade whom you would embrace.' Then Statius rose, saying, amid smiles and reverence: 'Now indeed you see what love I feel for you, since it made me forget our nothingness and treat shades as solid things!'

As the three went on in company they came to the next stairway, and the angel who guarded it fanned away the fifth mark from Dante's forehead, saying: 'Blessed are they who thirst after righteousness.' Thus was Dante made yet lighter, so that he followed Virgil and Statius without any weariness, listening entranced to the talk of those two poets of old time.

'Truly,' Virgil said to Statius, 'since Juvenal descended to that circle where I am, and told of your affection for me, I have ever felt much good will towards you, so that now the time in which I may be with you will seem too short. But tell me, and forgive the question of a friend, how, among so much wisdom in your breast, was there room for avarice?'

Statius smiled a little, and then answered: 'Indeed you do me wrong; avarice was far from me. I erred in prodigality, for this offence also is purged in the circle where you found me. It was a line of your verse

which checked me in this fault, and after that I strove to mend it.'

Then Virgil questioned him further. 'From your writings it seemed not that you had learned the True Faith,' he said. 'If this is so, what light dispelled your darkness, and taught you to follow Christ, the Fisher of Men?' For Virgil knew that if Statius had not been baptized a Christian while he was yet on earth, he would have been one of the company in Limbo, among those who were virtuous, but ignorant of the True Faith.

'It was your words,' Statius replied, 'that led me on to God. You did as one who walks at night and carries his lantern behind him, not seeing it himself, but lighting the steps of those who follow. For in your verse you said: "The world is renewed, justice returns, and the first age of man, and a new progeny descends from Heaven." While I lived, the world was already full of the True Belief, sown by Christ's Apostles; when I found this in your book, it harmonized so well with the words of the new preachers, that I took to visiting them; and their holy doctrine and righteous lives converted me, and I was baptized. So, although you knew not the true God yourself, through you was I a Christian.'

Then Statius asked Virgil where the souls of some of the ancient classic poets might be, and he asked particularly for Terence, Plautus, and Varro. Dante's guide told him that they were with him in Limbo, with Homer, Euripides, and many others.

'Often,' he said, 'we speak of Mount Parnassus, where the high Muses ever dwell.'

And more the two poets spoke together, but after a while fell silent, for as they talked the travellers had mounted to the sixth terrace, and were intent on gazing round, uncertain of their way. It was full morning, and Virgil said:

'I think that we should journey to our right, as we are wont to do.' This they did, and Virgil and Dante felt more sure of the way, since they had the company of Statius.

#### DANTE MEETS HIS FRIEND FORESE DONATI

As they went, Virgil and Statius still walked together, with Dante following them, intent upon their discourse. But soon in the midst of the way they came upon a tree which bore fair-looking fruit, pleasant to the nostrils. It grew in a strange manner, with the larger boughs on top and the smaller beneath, and seemed as if it grew thus so that none might climb it. And a clear spring of water fell from a high rock above, so that the water and the fruit of the tree offered pleasant food and drink.

As Dante was gazing upon the tree, he heard voices chanting psalms amid their tears. So he said to Virgil:

'Sweet father, what is this which I hear?' 'Shades



who purify themselves,' was the answer. Then, as wayfarers who overtake strangers in the road, turning and looking at them, and yet not staying their steps, so behind the poets and moving more quickly than they, came a throng of silent spirits, who turned back and gazed at them in wonder. Each one was hollow-eyed and pale; so wasted away that his skin was tight-stretched over his bones.

'These spirits suffer hunger,' Dante thought, but could see no reason for their leanness. As he was wondering at it, one of the shades turned its head, gazing fixedly at the poet, and then cried: 'What grace has granted me this?'

Dante would not have recognized the face, so changed was it, but by the voice he knew that this was his former friend, Forese Donati, with whom many hours of his youth had been spent. So he cried to him:

'Once on earth did I weep for your death, but now your changed face makes me sorrow no less than I did then. Tell me, in the name of God, what has changed you thus?'

Forese answered: 'All these spirits who sing as they weep purge themselves from the offence of gluttony—for on earth they followed appetite to excess. The scent from the fruit, and the spray which the falling water casts over the leaves of the tree, fill us with great desire to eat and drink. The denying of this desire is our purgation, and therefore do we waste away.'

Dante knew that Forese had delayed repentance till late in life, so he asked how it could be that his friend had already ascended so far up the mountain, and was not still in the Ante-Purgatory, suffering for his tardy turn to God.

'That do I owe to my wife Nella,' Forese replied. 'By her devout prayers she has freed me from the lower terraces, and brought me hither, so beloved is she of God, and so do the prayers of the living help us here. But, brother, hide yourself no longer from me—see how not only I, but all these spirits with me, gaze upon your body, casting a shadow in the sun's rays! Tell me of yourself.'

'If you remember what kind of life I led when you were with me on earth,' Dante began, 'it will still grieve you. From that unworthy life was I turned away by this my guide. He through the deep night has led me, still living, from the truly dead. Thence has he brought me hither, ascending and circling the mount, and he will be a companion to me until I shall be where Beatrice is, and then must he leave me. This guide of mine is Virgil, and the other with me is that spirit for whose purgation the whole mount lately shook.'

They did not cease their journeying because they spoke together, but went onward speedily, as a ship driven by a fair wind goes, and the other shades gazed in wonder at the living man among them.

Dante and Forese spoke of Florence, bewailing the evil customs into which she had fallen, and then

the poet asked his friend where his sister, Piccarda Donati, might be.

'My sister,' replied Forese, 'who triumphed in goodness as she did in beauty, now rejoices in her crown in Paradise.' Then he added: 'Here will I name to you others of my band, since their features are so changed that you could not know them.'

So he pointed out to Dante the poet Bonagiunta of Lucca, Pope Martin IV, and many others, all guilty of gluttony while they had lived.

Dante saw that the poet Bonagiunta was gazing at him, and seemed to have some knowledge of him. 'O spirit who seem to desire speech with me,' he said, 'speak, so that I may know what you would say.'

Then Bonagiunta asked if indeed he saw before him the poet Dante Alighieri, and he quoted one of Dante's poems, so that there should be no error.

Dante answered with modesty that he was one who, when Love breathed within him, wrote according to Love's dictates.

Then the two spoke together of Italian poetry, and how a new style of verse had arisen, and what this new style was. After a while all the spirits who were round the travellers hastened their steps, and ran onwards, except Forese. As one who is weary of running lets his companions go by and waits till his panting is relieved, so Forese let the band of spirits pass, and came on after them with Dante, saying: 'When shall I see you again?'

'I do not know how long I have to live,' Dante

replied, 'but indeed I hope not long, for my city is daily more stripped of good and seems doomed to bitter ruin.'

Then the two friends parted, Forese hastening on ahead, and Dante coming after with his guide and Statius, yet following Forese lovingly with his eyes.

After a little the travellers came to yet another tree, green of bough and laden with fruit, and beneath it they saw people lifting up their hands to the fruit like greedy children. When the poets reached the tree, they heard a voice coming out of it, which said: 'Pass onward, and come not near! Higher up will you see the Tree of Knowledge, of which this plant is a shoot.'

So they went on silently along the solitary way, each of them lost in contemplation. Suddenly they heard a voice saying: 'What do you ponder on thus as you go? If you desire to mount upward, here is the turn, and by this way must he pass who longs to reach peace.'

Dante looked up and saw the Angel of Temperance, who was so glowing bright that a mortal eye could not endure it. So the Florentine poet turned his head aside, and then a wind was on his brow, and he felt the angel's wings sweeping there, bringing a fragrance like that of the May breeze, herald of dawn, which bears the scent of grass and flowers.

And he heard the angel's voice saying: 'Blessed are they who hunger only after righteousness!'

GUIDO GUINICELLI AND ARNAUT DANIEL

As the three poets mounted by the new stair there was no hindrance to their ascent, for the light was full, it being little after midday. They went in single file, for the path was too narrow to admit of company. Dante longed to question his guide about many things which he had seen, but did not wish to seem persistent; so, like a small bird that opens its wings in the desire to fly, yet dares not leave the nest, he opened his mouth to speak, yet said nothing until urged on by Virgil. Then he asked many questions concerning the purifying he had seen, and Virgil gave answer to many of his doubts, and Statius to the rest, as being more practised in the nature of the place.

Then the three came to the next and seventh terrace, which was all filled with fire and a great burning. From all the surface of the place flames flashed up, but at the very edge a great wind blew from below, bending the flames back; and thus a narrow path was made between the rim of the terrace and the great burning. This was the path which the travellers had to take, moving in single file and carefully. Dante feared greatly, for he had the fire on one side, and the great precipice on the other; and Virgil said: 'Here must we watch our path with care, for it would be easy to take a false step.'

As they went they heard songs coming from within the fire, and saw spirits moving amid the flames, so

that Dante's gaze was divided, half directed on the path and half towards the shapes dimly seen among the burning.

Often as they went Virgil cried out to his charge: 'Have a care! At need, let my skill aid you.' They were circling the mountain so that the westering sun beat over Dante's right shoulder, and as he passed in front of the flames, his shadow made them seem more ruddy. The spirits saw this with astonishment, and some came towards him, but were careful not to leave the fire, lest their time of purifying should be lengthened.

'O you who go behind the others as if in reverence!' cried one of the burning spirits to Dante, 'give answer to me who am thus scorched in fire—and my companions also thirst to know—how is it that your body makes a wall against the sun, as if you were not yet within death's net?'

So Dante told of his journey and its cause, and how he was yet a living man.

'But,' he went on, 'tell me—and may Heaven the sooner hold you—who are you, and of what offence do you purge yourself?'

When they learned that Dante was yet living, the spirits were at first amazed, and stared at him speechless, as does a rough uncultured man from the far up-country when first he comes to a city. But after a while one of them answered him.

'Blessed are you,' it said, 'who come to learn of our mountain, so that you may lead a holier life! We who



burn here observed not the rules of chastity while we were in life, and thus in fire do we purge the sin. Little time would there be to name to you all who are here, but I who speak am Guido Guinicelli.'

Dante was deeply moved with love and reverence, for he knew this spirit to have been a poet of great worth, who had written many fair rhymes from which Dante himself had learnt much of the art of verse-making. Fain would the Florentine poet have embraced the spirit, but because of the fire he could not draw near, so he gazed long on him, and at last named himself, speaking of his willingness to serve Guido in any way that he might be able.

'If I hear truth,' said Guido, 'you with your verse are setting up a monument which the forgetful waters of Lethe can never dim. And if you praise my rhymes, here is one before me who was a better craftsman than I'—and he pointed to another spirit within the flames, giving him great praise and naming him as Arnaut Daniel, famed among poets of Provence.

'But,' Guido ended, 'if indeed you are privileged to go to that cloister where Christ rules, say for me there one prayer.' Then he vanished through the flames, as a fish disappears in the waters.

And Dante spoke in love and reverence to Arnaut Daniel, who answered him in the Provençal tongue.

'I am Arnaut who weep and go a-singing,' he said. 'I see my past madness, and I see with joy my future bliss. In due time be mindful of my pain!' Then he, too, hid himself in the purifying fire.

THE TRAVELLERS PASS THROUGH THE PURGING  
FIRE, AND ENTER THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The sun had already begun to sink, and evening was approaching, when the Angel of Chastity appeared to the travellers. He was standing on the narrow path between the flames and the brink of the cliff, and saying in a clear ringing voice:

'Blessed are the pure in heart!' Then, as the three approached, he said:

'No further may you go, O purified souls, unless you first feel the scorching of the flames. Enter into them, and as you pass through, listen to the singing on the other side.'

When Dante heard this he was so afraid that he became as one ready for the grave. He looked at the fire, and before his eyes rose terrible visions of burned human bodies.

But Virgil and Statius turned kindly towards him, and Virgil said:

'My son, here you may feel pain, but not death. Remember and think well on it, how I took you safely upon Geryon's back—do you then think that you will be less safe here, now that you are nearer to God? Believe with certainty, that were you to remain a full thousand years within these flames, you would not lose a single hair. And if you think I do not speak the truth, test the edge of your garments in the fire, and see! Put away all fear from you; come hither to me, and let us go forward in safety.'

But Dante still stood hesitating and afraid, so Virgil spoke again.

'See, my son,' he said, 'this wall of fire divides you from Beatrice.'

At those timely words Dante took heart and turned, showing himself ready to face the flames, so Virgil smiled, as at a child that is won by the promise of an apple. So the three entered into the fire, Dante between his guide and Statius. And when he felt the flames, he would have been ready to fling himself into molten glass for coolness, so great and fearful was the burning.

As they went Virgil talked ever of Beatrice, to encourage Dante. 'Already I seem to see her eyes,' he said. They heard a voice singing on the other side, and the sound guided them, so that by listening to it they came forth at last from the flames.

'Come, ye blessed of my Father!' rang out from a brilliant light before them, and then the angelic voice said: 'The sun sinks and the evening comes; linger not, but hasten your steps before the west grows dark.'

The travellers found themselves standing before the next ascent through the rock, and the sun shone so low behind them that they had mounted but a few steps when they saw that Dante's shadow had already vanished, for the sun had set. So before the great sweep of the horizon was fully darkened and night held sway, each of the travellers lay down upon a rocky step, for by the law of the mountain they might not ascend in the night-time.

As goats which were agile and restless on the heights grow quiet and silent when they have been fed, and lie in the heat guarded by the herd who leans on his staff; and as the shepherd passes the night afieid, watching silently beside his flock, lest some beast scatter it—so did the travellers then rest, Virgil and Statius as the shepherds watching over Dante; all three shut in by the high rock on either side.

They could see little around them, but Dante lay and watched the stars, which seemed bigger and brighter than they are wont to be; and as he lay thus pensive, sleep came upon him.

As he slept, just before the dawn he dreamed, and seemed to see a young and lovely lady gathering flowers in a meadow. As she went she sang: 'I am Leah, and I go gathering flowers to make me a garland. Rachel, my sister, sits at her mirror all day long—she delights in contemplation, I in action.'

But at the glow which heralds the full daybreak the shadows fled, and Dante's sleep fled with them, so that he rose and saw Virgil and Statius already alert for the journey.

'My son, this day shall your desires have peace, for you shall find that sweet fruit of happiness which is sought by all men.' So did Virgil speak to his charge, and never had Dante heard sweeter words. So greatly did he long to mount swiftly upwards, that at each step he felt winged for the ascent.

When the three had reached the topmost step, Virgil

turned again to Dante, saying: 'My son, you have seen the eternal and the temporal fires, and passed through Hell and Purgatory, and now you have come to a place where I can lead you no longer. Hither have I brought you, and now you are free from the hard and narrow ways. See here the sun, shining on your brow; see the tender grass, the flowers, and plants which this earth of itself brings forth. While you await her who, weeping, bade me come to your aid, you may sit in this fair place, or wander at your pleasure. Expect no longer guidance or a sign from me; free, upright, and whole is your will—and therefore do I crown and mitre you lord over yourself.'

And thus did Dante enter into the Earthly Paradise on the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

THE TRAVELLERS ARE GREETED BY MATILDA  
IN THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Dante looked around most eagerly and saw a great verdant forest before him. He longed so greatly to enter it, that he waited for no more words from Virgil, but left the mountain steep, crossing the plain with slow and lingering steps, so fragrant was the ground over which he walked.

All was very fair: the sweet dawn wind touched his forehead, and bent the branches of the trees, which

were filled with the songs of small birds, and the murmur of the leaves welcomed the morning air. When he had passed so far into the wood that he could not see the place where he had entered, his way was barred by a small stream, whose little waves bent the grasses at its edge. Although it flowed beneath the eternal shadows of the forest, its waters were so clear that they made the purest earthly streams seem thick and cloudy.

Dante paused, and was looking across the stream at the many sweet flowers there, when suddenly a lady appeared to him, walking alone, singing as she went, and gathering the flowers along her path.

'I pray you, fair lady,' Dante said, 'come forward a little towards the stream, that I may hear what you are singing. You seem to me fair as Proserpine, at the time when her mother lost her, and she saw the spring no more.'

This lady was Matilda, and she did as Dante begged, walking gently upon the red and yellow flowers beneath her feet, and coming nearer to the stream. As she reached its banks, where the little waves had made the grass all wet, she raised her eyes to Dante, smiling at him as she went on gathering flowers. The river between kept them three paces apart, and across it Matilda spoke to the travellers.

'You are new-comers in this place,' she said, 'and perchance you marvel because I laugh and sing, but I am praising the fair works of God. If there is aught that you would know, I come here ready for your



questioning. You who are in front and spoke to me, say if there is anything that you would learn.'

So Dante questioned her about the place wherein they walked, and about the stream, and she told him that this was the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, given by God to man, who stayed but a short while in it, changing it by his own fault for tears and labour. And she told him further that the wind which he felt on his brow carried down to earth the seeds of plants and trees, which the ground here bore freely of itself.

'And this stream,' she said, 'wells not from a spring like those on earth, which are fed by the varying rainfall, but it comes from a sure and constant fountain, which ever regains as much as it pours forth, for such is the will of God. Two streams flow from the fount—this one is Lethe, and those who drink of it lose the memory of every sin; while the other stream is Eunoë, and its waters restore the memory of every good deed. Eunoë's waters have a savour sweeter than any other, but Lethe must be tasted first.

'In this place man's race was innocent, and it may be that those poets of olden days who sang of the Golden Age of man had some dream or vision of this Earthly Paradise.'

Thus she spoke, and at the last words Virgil and Statius smiled, for in their time poets had written of the Golden Age.

Then Matilda sang again: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.'

While she sang she walked by the bank of the stream, as the nymphs who once walked alone through the forest shades. And Dante on the other bank walked with her, so that each step she took was matched by one of his.

After a little way the stream's course turned them eastward, and Matilda spoke to Dante, saying: 'My brother, look, and listen!'

#### THE PAGEANT OF THE CHURCH

At Matilda's bidding Dante looked before him, and saw a sudden great brightness flashing through the forest, and at first he took it to be lightning. But since lightning is over as quickly as it comes, and this brilliance remained, shining ever brighter and brighter, he marvelled as to what it could be. As he looked, the air seemed to become all flaming fire beneath the green boughs in front, and a sweet chanting rang through the forest. Then Dante thought he saw seven golden trees in the distance, but as he came nearer he knew them to be candlesticks, and among the words of the chanting he heard 'Hosanna!'

Above the candlesticks great lights flamed out, far brighter than the full moon in a clear midnight sky, so that Dante turned to his guide, wondering, and Virgil was no less lost in wonder than he.

But Matilda cried: 'See! Look not only on the lights, but see what comes after them!' Then the travellers saw people coming, clad in a white which shone purer than any white on earth. The waters of the stream at Dante's side reflected all this brilliance, and he halted to see better, for now only the stream was between him and the procession as it passed. It was led by the flames on the seven candlesticks; they went forward, trailing their fires behind them, so that the air seemed painted with seven rainbow pennants; and these banners streamed behind, far out of Dante's sight.

Behind them came four-and-twenty elders clad in white, and crowned with lilies, singing the praises of the Virgin Mary: 'Blessed art thou among the daughters of Adam.' When these chosen people had passed over the flowers and fresh grasses on the further bank, then, like star following star in the heavens, came four beasts crowned with green leaves, each with six wings full of eyes. And among the four of them came a two-wheeled triumphal chariot, drawn by a Griffon, whose great gold eagle's wings stretched upward out of sight between the flaming banners: his head too was golden, and his lion's body white and crimson.

Rome's triumphal cars would be as naught before the splendour of the chariot the Griffon drew—even the Sun's car would seem poor beside it! By the right wheel came three ladies dancing; one fiery red, one emerald green, and one white as snow; and by

the left wheel were four clad in purple, and the one among them who led the dance had three eyes in her head—these ladies were the seven Virtues.

After all this group came two old men, both venerable and grave in their bearing. The first Dante knew to be St. Luke, because of his physician's raiment, and the other was St. Paul, bearing a gleaming two-edged sword. Then came four more, lowly in semblance; and in the rear, one solitary old man, keen-eyed, but lost in a vision. These seven elders were white-robed but crowned in red, seeming thus to be all flame above the eyes.

As the chariot drew opposite Dante a clap of thunder echoed, and the pageant stopped its motion. The elders who had gone before turned to face the chariot, and shouted three times: 'Come, thou bride of Lebanon!' Then a hundred angels rose up on the chariot, singing praises and scattering flowers, and among the cloud of flowers a lady appeared, flame-clad with a green mantle above, and crowned with olive over her snow-white veil. She rose half-hidden by the falling flowers, as at dawn the sun is oft veiled by mist, so that the human eye can bear to look upon it.

Although Dante could not see her face, the spirit within him recognized her as his lady Beatrice, whom he had loved for so long a while; and when he felt the power of his old love he turned in awe to Virgil, as a little child runs to its mother when it is frightened or in pain.

But Virgil had left him—Virgil the sweet guide and father was no longer there; and all the fair and wondrous sights before him could not keep back Dante's bitter tears.

#### BEATRICE, AND DANTE'S FINAL REPENTANCE

'Dante, weep not because Virgil has left you—weep not yet, for soon you must weep for another cause.'

As his head was bowed in sorrow, Dante heard these words and, looking up, he saw that same lady who had been among the cloud of flowers on the chariot. She was speaking to him, and was still veiled, so that he could not see her face, but she seemed queen-like and stern in her bearing.

'Look at me well,' she said, 'for truly am I Beatrice. How did you dare to approach the mount?'

Dante cast down his eyes for shame, for he knew that after Beatrice had left the earth below he had ceased to follow her fair example, and had neglected virtue. He wept most bitterly, and as he wept the angels sang: 'In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust.' In their song they seemed to pity him, and seemed as though they would say to Beatrice: 'Lady, why do you shame him thus?'

But she, turning to the angels, spoke.

'This man when young was such,' she said, 'that he had in him the seed of all good things. While I

was on earth I guided him, and through my young eyes showed him the rightful way. But when I left my body and came up hither, although virtue and grace were increased in me, I became less dear to him, and he turned his steps from the true path, pursuing false visions. So low had he sunk that there was no way for him to reach salvation, save by first visiting the Lost People: therefore did I descend to Limbo, and with tears implored Virgil to be his guide. God's justice would be scorned if he came hither to such high mysteries without paying some meed of penitential tears.' Then she turned again to Dante. 'Say if all this be true,' she said. 'I have accused you, and if you would go forward, confession must be made.'

Dante was so cast down and fearful that he could not speak. Beatrice paused a little, and then: 'Answer me,' she said, 'for Lethe has not yet washed from you the memory of your sins.' Then at last Dante breathed a 'Yes,' mingled with shame and fear. More did Beatrice upbraid him, showing him where he had erred, and how he should have resisted temptation; and then at last she bade him look her in the eyes. So dazzling pure and fair did she seem that he could not endure it; and remorse and grief gnawed so at his heart that he fell senseless.

When he became once more aware of outward things, he saw Matilda above him, and she was saying: 'Hold me! Hold me!' Then he found himself neck-deep in the stream, over which Matilda was lightly



stepping, drawing him after her. She dipped his head, and made him drink, then drew him out on the further bank, where he heard voices softly chanting: 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'

The ladies who had danced at the wheels of the chariot took him, and led him up to Beatrice, bidding him gaze in her eyes, wherein the changing image of the Griffon was reflected.

'Beatrice,' they said, 'turn your holy eyes towards this faithful one of yours, who has come so far to seek you. Of your grace, reveal yourself, that he may discern your beauty!'

Then at last Beatrice showed herself unveiled, and no words can tell the splendour of eternal loving Light that shone from her. She smiled at Dante, and she seemed so like to the maiden whom he had loved on earth, and yet so much more, that he was blinded for a while, as a man who looks in the sun's eye.

When he could look again he saw that the whole pageant had wheeled round, the leaders moving eastward; and after all had passed, the Griffon drew the chariot forward, and Matilda followed by the right wheel, with Dante and Statius. So they paced through the great empty forest, and as they went a choir of angels sang.

They had gone but thrice the length of an arrow-shot when they came to a tree plucked bare of leaves and fruit, and this was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Very lofty it was, and its boughs spread wider at the summit than below.

The Griffon drew the chariot to the base of the tree, and bound the chariot pole to its trunk, and at once the barren tree put forth rosy and purple flowers, as earthly trees burst forth to green in springtime. Then the holy pageant broke into chanting, and as they chanted Dante fell asleep.

DANTE SEES MANY STRANGE THINGS IN ALLEGORY,  
AND IS PURIFIED AT LAST

After he had slept awhile a bright light rent the veil of Dante's sleep, and he heard a cry: 'Awake!' And as he wakened he saw Matilda bending over him—she who before had so gently guided him along the stream.

In perplexity he asked: 'Where is Beatrice?'

'See her there, sitting with her companions beneath the new-flowering tree,' Matilda answered. 'The others have gone on before, following the Griffon.'

Then Dante saw Beatrice seated beneath the tree, guarding the chariot which the Griffon had left tied to the trunk. The seven dancing ladies were in a ring about her, with the streaming fiery pennants in their hands.

'Here shall you stay a short while, and then shall you be with me eternally in that City where Christ is a citizen.' So Beatrice spoke to Dante, and then continuing, she said: 'Therefore, to profit the erring world, gaze now upon the Chariot of the Church, and

when you return to earth write down what you have seen.'

So Dante fixed his eyes on the chariot, and saw many strange and wondrous things. First, an eagle swept down upon the tree, rending its bark and leaves, then dashed against the car, which reeled like a storm-tossed ship.

A hungry fox then leapt into it, and Beatrice put the fox to flight, but the eagle followed, scattering its feathers upon the chariot. Then a dragon came and tore the chariot, which seemed to heal its own wound at once, putting forth seven heads, three horned like an ox, the others like a unicorn, so that the chariot became a monster, and on it sat a shameless woman, and a giant who kissed and scourged her.

Other strange things Dante saw; and then Beatrice rose up and paced onward, beckoning Dante to her side. As they went she spoke to him of what he had seen, and interpreted it as an allegory, once more bidding him remember his whole journey and tell it to all men.

Noonday had come, and the company halted at the edge of a pale shadow cast by the dark forest boughs over a fountain from which sprang two streams.

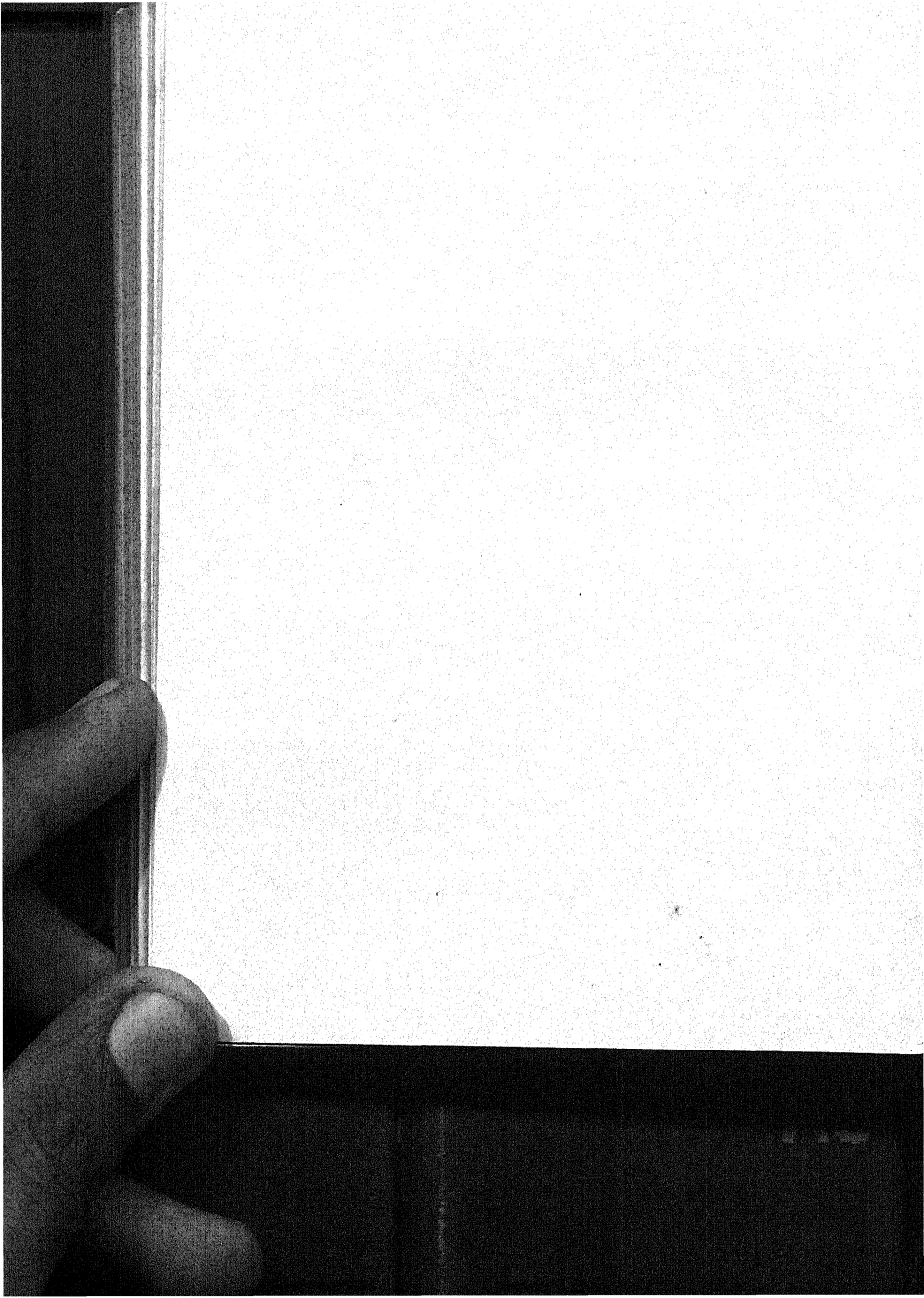
'O light of the human race,' Dante said to his new guide, 'what is this water springing from one source, and thus dividing?' For his draught of Lethe's water had taken from Dante the memory of what he had already learnt about these waters. Lethe he had drunk of, and forgotten his sins, and the other

stream was Eunoë, a draught of which brought back the memory of every good deed done.

Beatrice bade Matilda lead him thither for this second draught, and the kindly lady took him, bidding Statius come also.

No words can tell the sweetness of that water. Dante drank deeply, and arose from the fair stream pure as a child new-born, and ready to mount to the stars.

# PARADISE







## PARADISE

### DANTE PASSES INTO THE HEAVEN OF THE MOON

DANTE had now seen all the circles of the infernal abyss, and all the terraces of the Mount of Purgatory, and there only remained for him to enter into that Heaven which receives the greater part of God's glory. To tell of this holy kingdom fully is past the power of mortal man: to speak of it even in part needs the aid of Apollo and all the Muses!

It was noon in Purgatory, and Dante, gazing on Beatrice, saw her fix her eyes upon the sun. So he, too, did the like, and seemed to see sparkles coming from its orb, and such an increase of brilliant light that he thought a second sun must be in the heavens. But, as he was mortal, Dante's eyes could not long endure the dazzling, so he looked again on Beatrice, who still stood gazing heavenwards. As he looked, the brilliance spread and spread, so that the wide sweep of the sky seemed a great lake of splendour, and he heard the music of the celestial spheres.

As he gazed and listened, all bewildered, Beatrice smiled, and said:

'Your thoughts mislead you—you have left the earth and are mounting heavenwards. Through the great Sea of Being, God draws all things to Himself at

last, and the pure soul rises there, as to its natural place.'

The journey to Heaven may not be told in words, but Dante's desire to rise was so great that it bore him upwards swifter than an arrow's flight. Beatrice still gazed aloft, and Dante was gazing on her, when they came to a wondrous place which drew Dante's eyes to look upon it. And Beatrice turned to him. 'Give gratitude to God,' she said, 'who has brought us to the first star.'

They seemed to be received into the body of a cloud, but the cloud was solid, shining, and polished, like a diamond reflecting the sun's rays. This was the eternal pearl of the Moon, first of celestial bodies, and first of the nine moving spheres of Paradise; which are all crowned and guided by the Empyrean Heaven, spaceless and timeless, where God dwells.

Beatrice told Dante much of the structure of the heavens, and how all their parts reflected the love of God; and as she spoke she made many high and difficult things clear to him. He raised his head to thank her, but as he did so, he saw before him the faint and dim outlines of many human faces, which all seemed eager to speak with him. They seemed like the faint images cast back to a man who looks in a pool of clear but very shallow water, or in a thin transparent glass; so that Dante thought them to be reflections, and looked behind him. But behind him he saw nothing, so he turned to Beatrice, questioning.

She smiled and said: 'These are true substances, and

not images; here have they come to welcome you, so speak with them.'

So Dante turned to one of the faint forms, and said: 'O blessed spirit, who taste here the sweetness of eternal life—fain would I hear your name and fortune.'

The spirit answered eagerly, and with smiling eyes. 'Gladly will I tell you what you ask,' it said. 'Changed though I may be, if you gaze on me you will know me for Piccarda Donati, sister of your friend Forese. While yet a girl I fled from the world to follow the saintly order of the holy Clara; I wore her habit and took the vows of her company. Later, men more used to ill than good snatched me away from the sweet cloister; and after that God knoweth what my life became.

'Here with me on my right is the splendour of Constance the Empress. She was as a sister to me, and from her head was likewise snatched the holy veil. Yet, though we were both flung back into the world, never did we forget the vows our hearts had made. Here do we rest by God's decree, and in His will we find our peace.'

So did Piccarda speak, and then she began to sing the *Ave Maria*, and, singing, vanished through the pearl around, as a heavy thing slips into deep water.

Then Beatrice talked again with Dante, and expounded much to him; indeed, during all their journey through the moving spheres she taught him many things, and spoke of deep and difficult truths.

THE HEAVEN OF MERCURY, AND THE PROUD  
HISTORY OF THE ROMAN EAGLE

As she had done before they left the Mount of Purgatory, so again Beatrice turned her gaze aloft, and stood rapt. And she and Dante rose upwards to the second sphere, as swiftly as the flight of an arrow which reaches its mark before the bowstring ceases quivering. Beatrice glowed so bright with joy on gaining this heavenly sphere, that the sphere itself became the brighter for it. And, as in a clear pool the fish all draw together round aught that is dropped in, so here more than a thousand brilliant spirits clustered round Dante, each one showing its joy by the splendour that shone out from it.

'O happy born,' said one, 'whom grace allows to look upon the Thrones of Triumph ere your life is ended; we are illumined by the Light that spreads through all the heavens, therefore if you would question us, say on!'

Beatrice also bade Dante speak, so he began: 'Most noble soul, I see indeed how light shines round you; but who you were and why you are in this sphere, I know not.'

Dante had spoken to that spirit which had addressed him first, and he now saw it give forth an ever greater light, so that its figure was wholly enclosed and hidden in its own radiance. Thus hidden, it gave answer.

'I was Justinian the Emperor,' it said, 'and I

remade the laws of Rome. The blessed Agapetus led me to the true Christian faith, and after that I gave my whole self to this task of the Laws, leaving the conduct of war to my faithful Belisarius.

‘Since you have asked further, more will I tell you of the proud history of the Roman Eagle, that sacred standard which from its early days was worthy of greatest reverence. Three hundred years and more it dwelt in Alba; then, from the rape of the Sabine women through the reigns of seven kings, it conquered all the neighbouring people. Then the republic came, and the Eagle was borne high against Brennus, Pyrrhus, and the rest; and cast down the pride of those who followed Hannibal across the Alpine rocks. Under the Eagle Scipio and Pompey triumphed, and later Caesar grasped the sacred standard. Well do you know what it accomplished in his hands—from Var to Rhine the Eagle swept, through Gaul; then Caesar passed the Rubicon. Through Spain he passed, then to Pharsalia. Thereafter, with Augustus, the Roman standard made Brutus and Cassius howl in hell; Mark Antony sorrowed, and wretched Cleopatra, weeping as she fled before the Eagle, met sudden and dark death from a viper’s bite. Thus did the world find such deep peace that Janus’s gate was barred.

‘Then came Tiberius, under whom Christ died, and avenged thus the sin of all mankind. Under Titus, Jerusalem fell, and later still Charlemagne, in victory, rescued the Holy Church from the Lombard tooth.

So did Rome's Empire establish peace and guard the Church from harm! But now Church and Empire strive together, and from this struggle comes the cause of all your ills.

'You see this heavenly sphere of Mercury: it is fair with the spirits of those who strove that honour and fame might come to them, and through them to mankind. Justice and nobleness we loved, and here do we love them more.'

Further, Justinian told Dante that in this sphere was the spirit of Romeo, the just man of whom legend told that he had come as a poor pilgrim to the court of Raymond Berenger of Provence, and by him was made steward of all his possessions. Four daughters Count Raymond had, and by the wise and prudent advice of Romeo, each one was wedded to a reigning monarch. But the barons of Provence, through jealousy, accused Romeo of managing the count's possessions ill, and called upon him to give an account of all that he had done.

But Romeo knew that he had lived virtuously at that court, and by just means had increased the count's treasure greatly; yet, as the count seemed but little grateful, the steward asked to be given again that which he had brought with him when he first came to that place—a mule, a staff, and a scrip. Thus the just man departed as he had come, a poor pilgrim; and none knew what became of him, but many held him to be a saint.

Justinian had no need to tell the tale in full, for



Dante knew it; but the emperor gave honour to this Romeo who, in a less degree, had done for Provence what he himself had done for Rome.

The emperor's spirit ceased to speak, and hid itself in the distance with the other spirits who had surrounded Dante, all praising God as they went.

Then Beatrice taught Dante further, of the mystery of man's redemption by the birth and death of Christ; and as he listened, Dante's love for her increased, but reverence held him silent.

#### THE HEAVEN OF VENUS

Then Beatrice and Dante rose to the next star, the celestial sphere of Venus. Dante had no sense of rising, but knew when they had come there, since Beatrice shone yet brighter and grew more fair; for with every ascent they made, his guide became more beautiful, as she rose nearer to God.

So bright was the new star that it was hard at first to distinguish the spirits in it, but after awhile Dante saw them moving in a dancing circle, as sparks may be seen within a flame. They came swiftly towards him, leaving their dance, and singing 'Hosanna!' as they moved. One approached him, saying:

'We are akin to those spirits of Love of whom you wrote in verse; and we come hither to await your questioning.'

Dante asked this spirit its earthly name, and, shining more bright with joy, it gave answer:

'Greatly did you love me on earth, and had the world known me longer, I would have given you yet greater cause to hold me dear—Carlo Martello was I, heir to Provence and Naples.' Dante rejoiced greatly, for Carlo had been a close friend of his on earth; and the two spoke much together. When Carlo's spirit left him, another came forward, showing its wish to talk with Dante by glowing brighter as it came.

'I was sister to that Ezzelin,' the spirit said, 'whose mother dreamed, ere he was born, that she should bear a firebrand to burn up the country round—and truly she did so! Cunizza of Romano was I called, and here am I neighbour to one Folco, whose fair fame yet remains on earth. See how he shines!'

Cunizza left him then, and Dante turned his gaze on that other spirit of whom she had spoken. It shone before him as a bright ruby struck by the sun's rays, for all through Paradise the more the spirits rejoiced, the brighter they shone; as in Hell their sorrow was measured by their dark appearance. Dante knew Folco to have been a poet and singer of great renown, and later a man of God, so he called to him joyfully: 'O blessed spirit, let me hear your voice!'

So Folco spoke: 'I was born by that great sea which fills the southern valley,' he said. 'I was of Marseilles, and men called me Folco. In my youth I was a lover, and then became a monk.'

DANTE RISES TO THE HEAVEN OF THE SUN AND HEARS  
THE STORIES OF ST. FRANCIS AND ST. DOMINIC

Folco had spoken but briefly before departing, and afterwards Dante passed with Beatrice into the next celestial sphere—the Heaven of the Sun. Again he had no knowledge of the ascent, but found himself in a place of unspeakable splendour, and the spirits there shone even brighter than those which he had seen before. Twelve came forward to meet the travellers, and surrounded them as with a halo of light. As the spirits moved they sang, and their music was such as could only be heard in Heaven, and cannot be described on earth. They circled round thrice, like stars; then one began:

‘O travellers who have so much grace granted to you, would you know what spirits adorn this sphere, as plants blooming in a garland? I was one of the lambs of St. Dominic’s flock—I was Thomas Aquinas; and he on my right was as a brother and master to me, and was Albert of Cologne.’

Then Thomas Aquinas, learned sage and Dominican monk, named the other spirits to Dante; all in the world had been learned teachers and doctors. Gratian he named, Solomon the Great, Boethius, Bede, and many others; and when he had named them the circle of spirit lights moved round again with sweetest harmony, like to the matin chimes which waken men to praise.

As Dante heard, he thought what madness was in

the world below—some men entangling themselves in matters of the law, some seeking power by violence or intrigue, others plundering, others abandoned to slothful ease and the vain delights of the flesh; while he, released from all this, was received thus gloriously in Heaven.

The spirit of Thomas Aquinas saw his thoughts and spoke again.

'The Divine Providence,' he said, 'ordained that for succour of the Church two great saints should rise on her behalf and guide her. One of these two, St. Francis, was as a seraph in his loving kindness; the other, St. Dominic, was wise and full of knowledge as a cherub. Both wrought to one end, so he who praises one, praises the other also, and I would speak to you of Francis.

'Not far from Perugia and the stream Chiasco lies a slope, whereon was born such a man that one might well call his birthplace Orient, not Assisi, for truly he was a Bringer of Light. He was yet full young when the world began to feel some comfort from his strength, for he loved the Lady Poverty, and for her sake defied his father's will and then his bishop's, stripping himself of his possessions and publicly acclaiming Poverty as his bride—she who had been scorned and deserted since the death of Christ.

'The harmony and fair example of Francis and his bride made men wonder, and gave rise to sacred thoughts: so that the noble Bernard, first disciple, cast off his sandals and ran to follow such great peace;

and so eager was he that as he ran he thought he moved too slowly. Egidius, Sylvester, and many others followed, all binding on the hempen cord, girdle of Poverty. No pride weighed Francis down for that he had been the son of a great nobleman; nor did he rebel that men despised and mocked him so greatly. Pope Innocent gave sanction to his Order, Honorius confirmed it, and Francis preached Christ before the Soldan, returning at last to the harsh rock between Tiber and Arno, where he received from Heaven the marks of Christ's own Passion on his body; and he bore those marks to his grave.

'And when at last God called him to receive his reward, he bade his brethren serve the Lady Poverty right well and faithfully, and had them place him on the ground to die, since his body was of the earth, and for that body he asked no other bier. Such was the holy Francis of Assisi!'

The flame of Thomas's spirit ceased to speak, and as it ceased, another shining band of spirits came up, encircling the first and singing so sweetly that our fairest strains on earth are but a pale reflection of that music.

The two circles wheeled, and seemed like a double rainbow seen through thin mist — song echoed song and light answered flashing light.

Then from the heart of one of the new-come splendours a voice came forth, drawing all Dante's thoughts towards it, as the Northern Star draws a compass-needle.

'That Love which makes me fair and shining bright,' it began, 'urges me to speak of that other great saint and leader, Dominic, whom Thomas Aquinas followed, as I followed Francis. Christ's earthly army was so wretched, and his soldiers so few, that God took counsel for His faithful ones, and sent the champions, Francis and Dominic, whose speech and action once more bound that scattered army together and gave it strength.

'Calahorra in far Spain was the birthplace of this Dominic, and scarce had he been received into the Church when the lady who bore him at his baptism dreamed that he had a bright star on his brow, and that this star illumined all the world. Truly was Dominic the husbandman of Christ's orchard, and well did he show himself a messenger from God! Soor he became a learned teacher, seeking not gain thereby, but only truth; and then he sought the Pope, but not to win high office; rather for leave to fight for God's word against the erring world.

'So by his teaching and preaching, and the words of his flock, understanding grew and much error was stamped out; and his Order has sent forth many streamlets which water the orchard of the Faith. Such was St. Dominic, and brother Thomas's courteous praise of Francis moved me to speak thus of the other of Christ's paladins. I am Bonaventura, and in life I ever gave more care to the spirit than to the world.'

Then Bonaventura, once head of the Franciscan



Order of monks, named to Dante the other saints who were with him.

When he had done speaking, the glowing spirits of these noble saints and doctors ranged themselves in a heavenly dance: the thought of the four-and-twenty brightest stars in the sky, wheeling in two flashing circles, can scarcely give a picture of it.

Thomas Aquinas spoke again, and Solomon followed him, telling Dante how perfect and yet more joyful would all these souls be after the Day of Resurrection, when each would have its earthly body joined to it in eternal blessedness. The other spirits glowed and quivered in assent and, shining brightly, another ring of spirits seemed to form, encircling both the earlier two, and the whole heavenly pattern grew so brilliant and sparkling that Dante's eyes could scarce endure it.

DANTE MEETS HIS ANCESTOR CACCIAGUIDA  
IN THE HEAVEN OF MARS

Then Dante passed with Beatrice to the next celestial sphere, the Heaven of Mars; and that ruddy star shone brighter at their coming. Scarcely had the Florentine poet given thanks to God for this new ascent, when he saw before him a great shining blood-red Cross, along whose arms from end to end were

brilliant lights like stars, which gleamed and sparkled as they passed each other. These were the souls of warrior saints, moving thus in the blood-red Cross of Mars, and as they went they seemed to sing, for a chanting came out of the Cross. Dante could scarce hear the words, but it seemed to be a psalm of lofty praise and victory, for the words 'Rise up and conquer' came to him.

After a while the hymn of the warriors of God ceased, and Dante, still gazing at the Cross, saw a new wonder. As in a serene pure sky men can see shooting stars, so from the right arm of the glowing Cross a sparkling light darted to the Cross's foot, not leaving its ribbon of brilliance, but coursing along the central line of the bar, like fire running behind alabaster. And this spirit-light spoke to Dante lovingly, as Anchises greeted Aeneas in Elysium.

'O son of mine! Never was God's grace given in such measure to any other, that he might twice enter Heaven!' These were the spirit's first words, and when Dante heard them, he looked back to Beatrice; he was lost in wonder at that which he had heard, but was no less enraptured by the eyes of Beatrice, which blazed forth such a smile that he could not but think he had seen the depth and height of Paradise.

Then the spirit spoke again, at first with words too rapturous and high for Dante's comprehension. But then it said: 'Blessed art Thou, O Triune God, who art so courteous unto my race!' And it continued:

'Secure and bold and joyous be your questioning, my son, for long have I foreseen and awaited your coming!'

So Dante turned to Beatrice for her consenting sign, which added wings to his desire to speak.

'O blessed spirit,' he began, 'I cannot thank you as I would, for I am too much aware of my mortality and your blessedness; so only in my heart do I give thanks for your paternal greeting. But, O precious jewel of this star—tell me your name!'

'O leaf of mine, I was the root of your race,' the spirit then began. 'He from whom your kindred took its name was my son, and your great-grandfather.'

'In my time Florence, within her ancient walls, still abode sober and chaste. Her women yet wore no chains nor coronets; nor decked themselves to catch the eyes of men. There were no mansions empty of their households; and I saw many fathers of noble families content to wear but a skin jerkin girt with bone and leather, and their dames worked with spindle and flax, coming from their mirrors with unpainted faces. Oh, happy they! who feared no strange burial-place: one lady would keep watch over the cradle, soothing her child with gentle childlike words; another, as she drew upon the distaff, would tell her household ancient tales of Troy and Rome.'

'To this fair and peaceful life, in this faithful and sweet city, was I born! In the ancient baptistery of Florence I became a Christian, and received the name of Cacciaguida; my wife came from the valley of the

Po, and from her you take your surname. Later I followed the Emperor Conrad, and he made me one of his knights. I marched behind him on a crusade, and by our enemies was I cut down, and came from martyrdom into this peace.'

To see and hear his ancestor in this way gave Dante such eager joy that his mind was near filled with it to overflowing, and he spoke to Cacciaguida with much love and reverence.

'Tell me, dear stock from which I sprang,' he said, 'what was your ancestry? Tell me of Florence in those ancient times—of how great she was, and of her noblest citizens.'

The spirit of Dante's ancestor flamed brighter at these words, as a glowing coal blown upon by the wind, and Cacciaguida began to speak, in a dialect of old time.

'Of my great ancestry it is more fitting that I should not speak,' he said, 'but I was born in the year of our Lord 1091. At that time all the citizenry of Florence capable of arms were but a fifth of those which there now are; but all the stock that is now so mingled was then pure down to the humblest artisan. Much too great has the city now become; she has taken within her walls too many from outside—much better would it have been had all those people remained neighbours and not citizens!' Then Cacciaguida named many of the illustrious men in ancient Florence, families of great repute and worthy of their fame. 'With such people,' he concluded, 'did I see Florence

peaceful and content—glorious and just she was, nor were her citizens torn by factions.'

Thus Cacciaguida spoke, and after a little Dante questioned him again.

'Dear soil from which I sprang,' he said, 'when I passed with Virgil among the truly dead, and on that mount where souls are purified, many hard things were said to me obscurely, as to my future on the earth. You see all things clearly, and although I feel strong-armed against the blows of Fortune, I would fain know what sorrows and disasters I must endure, for the arrow whose coming is seen before strikes less bitterly.'

Not in dark sayings, but with clear words and loving discourse, Cacciaguida answered.

'You must abandon Florence,' he said, 'this is already plotted and contrived, and you, the injured one, will be accused of guilt, albeit you are innocent. You will leave all things loved most dearly, and this will be the first arrow shot by the bow of Exile. You will make trial of how salt another's bread can taste, and of how hard it is to mount and descend upon another's stair. And the most bitter thing will be the company you needs must keep — vicious and impious will it be, and ungrateful to you, but you will leave it, and it shall be to your fair fame to do so. Many shall open their doors to give you refuge.'

And having thus warned Dante of his coming exile, Cacciaguida named and praised some of those lords who would receive him in his wanderings, and bade

him not be envious of his foes' short triumph, for his name would live long after his accusers had come to punishment.

Then Dante spoke again:

'Father, I understand you well, and see how Fortune will buffet me. But tell me one thing further—down among the truly dead, and on the mountain whence my lady brought me hither, and also here in Heaven, I have learnt much that will be bitter unto many if I tell of it on earth: yet I would fain be no timid friend to truth.'

'Indeed, those whose consciences are darkened will not relish your clear words,' Cacciaguida replied; 'but none the less, make your whole vision manifest, cast every lie aside and cry loudest upon corruption in high places. This shall be no small honour to you, and while you journeyed you have spoken only to souls well known by fame, so that you should tell of it, for else would your examples bear little weight.'

Here Cacciaguida ceased speaking, and Dante stood pondering over that which he had heard, finding much of it bitter, but Beatrice spoke loving words to him, and as he gazed deeply into her eyes he was comforted. Then she smiled, saying: 'Turn, and look and listen, for not only in my eyes is Paradise.'

So Dante turned, and saw the glowing spirit of his ancestor, desiring to speak yet further with him.

'Gaze on the flaming Cross,' said Cacciaguida, 'and as I name them, you shall see God's warrior saints flash through the sky.'



Then he named many of God's paladins of every age: Joshua, Charlemagne, Orlando, William of Aquitaine, Robert Guiscard, and many more; and as he named them, their flaming spirit-stars darted along the Cross's beam, like a charge of celestial chivalry through the sky. Then Cacciaguida mingled his own light with theirs, and cadences of harmony rang forth.

THE HEAVEN OF JUPITER, AND THE SPIRITS  
OF THE JUST PRINCES

Again the travellers rose, and the sixth star, the Heaven of Jupiter, glowed silvery white around them, as Beatrice grew yet more fair.

Then Dante saw spirits shining as sparkling golden lights within the silver sphere, flying and singing like celestial birds. While he looked, they moved and formed letters in the air, and then this sentence:

Love justice, ye that be judges of the earth.

Then the golden spirit-lights traced an M, symbol of Monarchy or Empire; and after a little, wheeling and sparkling, formed of this M a whole Imperial Eagle, as a sign that Roman Law and Justice must rule the world.

Thus Dante learned that in this fair star Justice was supreme; for the glowing golden spirits were those

who on earth had been faithful and just rulers and princes. Before the poet's eyes shone the great Eagle with outspread wings, formed by the star-like spirits of these princes; and since they had ruled all to one end, and with one great principle of Justice, so from the Eagle they spoke all with one voice, as many heated brands give out one warmth.

'Since I was just and righteous upon earth,' they said, 'so am I here exalted to this glory, and on the earth have left a memory that evil men still praise, though they follow not its lesson.'

Then Dante spoke to them: 'O blessed spirits,' he said, 'since Divine Justice is clear to you without a veil—solve for me the problem which has long tormented me. You know what I would ask, therefore I voice it not.'

The Eagle glowed yet brighter, and the spirits answered from it with one voice.

'You would know,' they said, 'how it is just that a man born far away with none to tell him of Christ, who dies unbaptized, yet has lived virtuously as far as human reason sees, is not allowed to enter Heaven? Who are you to question God's decree, or judge it? Learn that none ever rose to this heavenly realm who knew not Christ; yet many unbaptized shall be far nearer to Him at the Judgment than some that have ever cried upon His name—God's justice is inscrutable and deep—believe only, and question not.'

As the little stork looks up when fed to the parent bird poised above the nest, so Dante looked up

in reverence to the wheeling Eagle above him. It spoke again, condemning most bitterly many reigning monarchs for the corruption and injustice of their rule. As its voice ceased, the many spirits in it burst into song, like the chiming of peals of angelic bells, and then Dante seemed to hear the murmur of a falling river, dropping clear from rock to rock. This sound again was unified, and grew to a voice which came from the Eagle's beak.

'Gaze now upon my eye,' it said, 'for of all the spirits tracing out my form, those which shape my eye are chiefest. He who shines in the midst, as the eye's pupil, was David the King, who sang of the Holy Spirit, and now does he know the full value of his psalms! Those five lights forming the eyebrow's arch were Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine the Great, William of Sicily, and the Trojan Ripheus.' More it said, telling to Dante how, by the prayer and faith of others, some heathen might be raised to blessedness. And as it spoke of Heavenly Justice, the great Eagle shone yet more bright and dazzling.

THE LADDER OF CONTEMPLATION: PETER  
DAMIAN AND ST. BENEDICT

Once more the Florentine poet rose with Beatrice, and reached the seventh star, the Heaven of Saturn. Joyful as she was, Beatrice did not smile, for as she

grew ever more fair, her smile would have been too dazzling for Dante's mortal eyes to endure.

In this sphere Dante saw before him a great shining ladder, going so high aloft that his sight could not follow it; and down this ladder came so many glowing spirits, that he thought all those in the Heavens must have gathered there. As they reached a certain step they scattered, some wheeling back again, and some departing. But one spirit stayed so near to Dante, and shone so brightly, that the Florentine poet thought:

'This one would speak to me. But Beatrice has not yet given me leave to speak, so I do well to be silent.' Then Beatrice read his thoughts, and bade him speak.

So he questioned the spirit, and learnt that he heard no music in this sphere as he had heard in all the others, because it would have been too overwhelming for his mortal senses to endure. The spirit spoke more, and then told who it was.

'On the high crags betwixt Italy's two shores,' it said, 'there is a hermitage where I, Peter Damian, grew so to love God that, with scant food, I endured both heat and cold, wrapt utterly in a life of contemplation. Little of mortal time was left to me, when I was called to receive the scarlet cardinal's hat.' Then Peter Damian, great saint and cardinal of old time, rebuked most bitterly the vice and luxury of modern prelates.

As he spoke thus, many more spirits came down

the ladder, whirling and brightening as they descended. They grouped themselves round Peter, raising a great cry louder than any mortal thunder; and Dante could not hear the words of the cry, and feared most greatly.

But as he turned to Beatrice he found her ready to console. She said:

‘Do you not know that you are in Heaven? And that in Heaven naught can harm you, for all is holy? All that is done here is done for righteousness—the spirits did but echo Peter’s judgments. Turn back again, for you will see many other noble spirits.’

So Dante turned back to the Celestial Ladder, and saw on it a hundred souls shining together, and made brighter and fairer by their mutual rays. The brightest among them spoke to Dante.

‘The mount on which Cassino lies,’ it said, ‘once bore a temple sacred to the pagan gods. I am Benedict, who first took to that mountain the Faith in Him by whom truth came to the world. These other spirits were all men who delighted in contemplation, and were given to God. Many were my brother monks, who kept their feet close within the cloister, and their hearts pure.’

St. Benedict had spoken with such loving-kindness that Dante was emboldened to ask if he might see the saint freely, without the shield of radiant light which hid his image.

‘Brother,’ replied Benedict, ‘your high desire shall be fulfilled when you come to the last sphere, where all desires are perfect, ripe, whole, and fully satisfied.’

This ladder before you goes up to that last sphere; it is the Ladder of Contemplation, and the patriarch Jacob saw it stretch aloft, laden with angels. But now on earth none strive to mount it, for all the monkish Orders are degenerate. Peter began his ministry without gold or silver, Francis laid down the rules of his Order with humbleness, and I mine with prayer and fasting; but all have left their former paths and darkened their purity of heart.'

St. Benedict ceased to speak, and all the band of contemplative saints and monks drew close together. Then all flew upwards, gathered as in a whirlwind. Beatrice signed to Dante that he should follow them, and her power so overcame his human nature that he mounted upward without knowing how; never was mortal movement as swift as his flight, for in an instant he was within the next sphere and entering the Stellar Heaven.

'You are now so nigh to the Supremest Glory,' Beatrice began, 'that your eyes should have become clear and keen. Therefore, before we go on upward, look down and see how great a universe lies below you.'

So Dante turned back, looking beneath him, and saw all the seven spheres through which he had passed, and the earth's globe. He saw the Moon, the Sun, Mercury, and Venus, then temperate Jupiter between hot Mars and chill Saturn—their wheeling orbits were laid out before him, and he saw how great each is, and swift. Lastly he saw the little earth whereon men strive so fiercely: it seemed so small that he smiled to



see it laid out there before him, so that he could trace each river's course, from the springing to the mouth.

Then he turned back his eyes once more to Beatrice.

THE APOSTLES PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN EXAMINE  
DANTE, WHO THEN SPEAKS TO ADAM

The mother bird, who through the night has longed for day that she might go seeking food for her young ones, perches ere dawn on a spray, and gazing, waits eagerly for the sun to rise. In a like manner Beatrice stood facing the east, gazing intently before her. After a while she spoke:

'Behold the triumphant hosts of Christ!' she said. And Dante saw one blazing sun outshining many thousand lights, but the central substance of that sun burned through the radiant light so overpoweringly that Dante could not endure it. So did Christ's light outshine His saints'! But Dante's mind, overcharged with all these mystic splendours, could not sustain the vision, and what he then became he knew not.

After a while he heard Beatrice calling him; he seemed like one coming to himself after a forgotten vision, and Beatrice spoke to him and smiled on him. To describe the beauty of her smile is no theme for mortal pen; and truly Dante's whole journey is scarce a voyage for the little barque of human wit!

'Gaze not on me alone,' said Beatrice. 'Turn, turn

your eyes to the fair garden flowering beneath Christ's beams! There is that Virgin Rose wherein God was made flesh, and there the Apostolic Lilies who led the way to truth!

So Dante looked again, and saw many hosts of radiant spirits under a light which came from behind a veil, like a fair meadow full of flowers, lit by the sun shining behind a cloud. Christ, in His mercy for the pilgrim's mortal eyes, had veiled Himself.

The greatest flame in this garden was the fair Virgin Rose, and a light circled down torch-wise, crown-shaped, and wheeled around her. The sweetest of earthly melodies, whichever most can move the soul, would seem harsh as the thunderclap from a torn cloud, before the music which that light gave forth.

'I am the Angelic Love which comes to you, and I will circle you till you arise, Lady of Heaven, and follow your Son to the supremest sphere.' So Gabriel sang, and from all the other spirits Mary's name rang forth. Then the crowned flame ascended, and the other lights sent radiance upward, following her with their love. In themselves they did not move, but stayed fixed within Dante's sight, singing: *Regina Coeli*; and these souls were Christ's own Apostles.

Then Beatrice spoke to them. 'O fellowship elect,' she said, 'you who taste ever of the Supper of the Lamb, give heed to this man's yearning, and give him to drink of the Fountain of God's wisdom.'

Then those glad souls grew ever brighter, flaming like comets as they wheeled. And one, the brightest

there, swept thrice round Beatrice, with divinest song.

'O holy sister,' it began, 'with your loving prayer you have summoned me.'

Beatrice said: 'Peter, by that Faith of which you hold the Keys, and by which you once walked upon the sea, question this man on his Faith; it is well that his knowledge should be tested.'

St. Peter questioned Dante, and was content with his answer, for he blessed the poet and circled three times round him.

Then the spirit of the Apostle James greeted Peter, and questioned Dante as to Hope, and also was content with him. Thirdly, another burning splendour came, the Apostle John, and Dante strained his eyes through the splendour, that he might see John's body.

'Why do you blind yourself to see what is not here?' the Apostle said. 'My body is in the earth, and there shall it be until the Day of Resurrection.'

Then Dante turned to Beatrice, and was greatly troubled, for though he stood near her he could not see her, since he was utterly blinded by the spirit-lights. But John reassured him, saying that his sight was but suspended, not destroyed, and that Beatrice would give it back to him again.

Then he examined Dante upon Charity, and the poet acquitted himself so well that a song of praise rang through the Heaven, and Beatrice joined in it; turning then to Dante, and with a glance restoring his sight, so that he saw far clearer than before.

A fourth light had come out to them, and Beatrice told her charge that its rays enclosed the soul of Adam, first of men. Dante had longed to speak with him, and so began: 'O ancient father!—you to whom every woman is both daughter and daughter-in-law—most devoutly do I implore speech with you!'

Adam came towards him, shining bright with joy, and said:

'Though you ask it not, I know what you would have me tell you. You would know how long it is since God placed me in Eden's fair Garden, how long I stayed there, and what tongue I spoke.

'I was placed in the Garden five thousand and two hundred years before Christ's coming; more than nine centuries I lived on earth, and then was in Limbo till Christ brought me to this joy. The tongue I spoke was lost ere Nimrod's company began the Tower of Babel, for no product of man's mind can last for ever. Nature grants man the power of speech; but how he speaks he chooses as he will, for mortal custom is as the leaf upon the bough, which passes and another comes. Scarce seven hours did I remain in the Garden of Eden.' As Adam ceased to speak, all Paradise rang with a psalm of glory.

When it was over, Peter spoke again, his light glowing red with indignation; and he denounced most bitterly the corruption of many who had held his seat in Rome. He had not held the Papal Keys, he said, as a standard of warfare; and the early popes had fed their flock, not given them to the ravening wolves!

Terrible was his denunciation—Beatrice blushed as she heard the tale of shame, and all Heaven grew dark with sorrow. Peter bade Dante carry his words to earth, and tell them fully—then, as in winter-time great flakes of snow fall steadily down to earth, so the noble glowing souls, like flakes of flame, rose upward into a higher region of Paradise.

DANTE MOUNTS INTO THE CRYSTALLINE HEAVEN AND  
HEARS THE STORY OF THE ANGELIC HIERARCHIES

As the shining spirits disappeared, Dante strained his eyes after them till they were lost to sight. Then Beatrice bade him plunge his gaze downward, and look once more upon the earth beneath. The spheres had wheeled since he had last looked down, and now he saw the world as in a map, the sun shining upon the whole Mediterranean, further west than Gibraltar's straits, and east to the Levantine shores; beyond which all was dark, for it was night-time.

Then Dante turned his eyes again to Beatrice, and as she glowed still brighter and more fair, they passed upward into the ninth star, last of the wheeling spheres—the Crystalline Heaven. This sphere directed the movements of the others: in it all Nature began, and Time and Motion.

As Beatrice spoke to Dante, telling him thus of the

nature of this sphere, he gazed in her eyes, and saw something new reflected in them. So he turned to see what it might be; and before him was a point of light so brilliant that the eye could not endure it. It was smaller than appears the smallest star we see, and round it wheeled nine fiery circles, each like a halo enclosing the one before it. The smallest circle, which wheeled nearest to the central flaming point, was the brightest and moved the most swiftly, while the others were gradated in speed and brilliance.

Beatrice, seeing Dante lost in wonder and bewilderment, told him that this was a vision of the nine Angelic Hierarchies circling round God, the central and prime Mover of all things, and those the nearest to Him shone the brightest.

Those in the brightest circle were the Seraphim, images of God's Love; then came the Cherubim, the wise ones; then the Thrones, the steadfast; the Dominations, God's Dominion; the Powers, God's Power and Majesty; and the Virtues, Divine Strength and Fortitude. Then came the Principalities, to guide all earthly rulers; the Archangels, God's messengers and the protectors of nations; and last the Angels, who guard separate men.

All this Beatrice told to Dante, and then she spoke more of the Angelic Hierarchies; how they came into being at the time of Creation; and how some, through their cursed pride, fell with Lucifer, whom Dante had seen in deepest Hell, oppressed by the weight of the whole world.



'These other Angels, now set near to God,' she said, 'in humility acknowledged themselves derived from Him, so they were set up and exalted thus. Their number is greater than mortal man is able to conceive of, but all are different. Such is the height and breadth of God, who breaks His Light upon so many mirrors, and yet remains One as before!'

DANTE RISES TO THE EMPYREAN HEAVEN AND  
SEES ALL THE RANKS OF THE BLESSED

All this and much more Beatrice told Dante of the Angelic Hierarchies, and while she spoke the fiery rings were fading, as stars fade at dawn, till at last Dante could no longer see them, and he turned again to his guide.

As he gazed upon her, her beauty became such that no tongue could tell of it, nor eye fully comprehend it. She had shone bright and been supremely fair before, but her beauty now was of such a measure that only God who made it could fully look upon it. From his youth up Dante had sung of her in verse, but when he told of her perfection in Paradise, he owned the theme had outrun his powers.

'Now we have left the Heavens which encompass all space,' Beatrice said, 'and we have reached the Empyrean, the Heaven of Light and Love and Joy,

which is not in space. Here shall you see the hosts of Paradise and all God's chosen in their bodily forms.'

Then a great flash of light enfolded Dante; so glowing and brilliant that for a while it blinded him, but afterwards he was left with new-given sight, of such a power and heavenly quality that there was naught he could not look upon. So he looked forth and saw a burning river of light glowing between banks which bore the fairest of spring flowers. Living sparks flew out from the river, and dropped upon the blossoms on the banks, seeming thus like rubies set in gold; then the sparks fell again into the river, and others flew out.

'This river and the flying sparks and blossoms,' Beatrice said, 'are but the symbols of their true selves. Even yet your sight cannot fully compass the Truth, so that you see the symbol only. This is the River of Divine Grace, the Fount of Wisdom, from which the Cherubim drink. Gaze on it, that your sight may be made still stronger, and you may learn the full reality of that which appears to you.'

So Dante hastened to the river's glowing brink, and gazed deeply into it. As he gazed his sight seemed to become yet more clear, and what he saw changed its aspect. The river of light ceased to seem a river and became a circular ocean of splendour: the sparks were angels, and the flowers showed themselves as God's elect, seated in many thousand ranks around the glowing circle, whence God's own Light shone up upon

them, and the blessed ones were reflected in this ocean of light, as a hillside is mirrored in water at its foot.

Thus the gold of the Eternal Rose shone out, with the saints seated circle-wise, rank upon rank, all praising God.

Then Beatrice spoke again. 'See how great is the concourse of the White-robed Ones! See how wide our city sweeps! See how few thrones are yet left vacant!'

Dante gazed again upon the ranks before him, and saw how the Redeemed were seated in the form of a white glowing Rose, unfolding petal upon petal around the central glowing Light. And, as a swarm of bees fly to and fro between the flowers and their own hives, so the flying angels went to and fro among the petals of that Rose, and ever and again ascended to the Source of so much light. The angels' faces were all of living flame, their wings were golden, and the rest of them far whiter than any snow; and as they flew among the petals of the Rose they gave fresh peace and ardour to the blessed. But all this flying multitude hid none of God's piercing light, nor did it hide from Dante the forms of the Redeemed, for naught could hinder the glow of the Divine Brilliance. All the inhabitants of that fair realm centred their gaze aloft, on that fair Threefold Light which blessed them thus.

And Dante looked in speechless rapture on this sight; thinking that if the barbarian bands from the far north had stood stupefied at their first sight of

mighty Rome, how must he needs be rapt in wonder, coming from human to Divine, from time to Timelessness, and from the corruption of Florence to such a noble and holy people! So he gazed upon the ranks, now up, now down, now round, and he saw fair and loving countenances, lit with Divine Light and with their own smiles; and movements graced with all dignity.

He had seen the full general form of the Rose, yet had not stayed his gaze on any especial point, when he turned to Beatrice, with the intent to ask her many things. But Beatrice was no longer beside him, and in her place Dante saw an elder, robed in white as all the blessed were, who greeted him tenderly and joyfully, like a kindly father.

DANTE GAZES UPON THE ROSE OF PARADISE  
AND IS GRANTED THE FINAL VISION

'Where is Beatrice?' Dante cried.

'At her prayer I came from my place to lead you to your last goal,' his new guide answered. 'Look up to the third petal of the Rose, and you will see her enthroned according to her merit.'

So Dante looked up and saw her, far distant among the ranks of the blessed, yet seeming no less near than when she had stood by him.

'O Lady, who for my sake left your footprints in Hell,' he cried, 'through your power and goodness have I seen so many and such great things; and you, by these paths, have brought me from slavery to liberty. Watch ever over me, so that I may keep the Vision and the Path, when I return to earth!'

As Dante spoke thus, Beatrice looked down upon him once more and smiled, then turned her gaze back to the Fount of Light.

Then the white-robed saint beside him said: 'Look upon the fair flower of the Rose, for thus will your sight be strengthened to meet the Final Vision. The Queen of Heaven will aid us, for I am her faithful Bernard.'

Dante gazed on him with wonder and awe, knowing that this was the saint who had seen God while yet on earth.

Then again St. Bernard bade him look up, so he fixed his eyes once more on the Rose, and saw a point at its upper edge which glowed with far greater brilliance than all the rest; and round that point more than a thousand flying angels rejoiced. This was the throne of the Queen of Heaven, Mary the Virgin Mother. No human words may dare to describe her beauty, for among all the saints she is most like to God's own image.

As they both gazed, St. Bernard explained to Dante the pattern of the Rose of Paradise. From Mary downwards, through the centre of the Rose and out to the lowest rim ran a cleaving line, made up of the

saints of old time, women and men: Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth, John the Baptist, Francis, Benedict, Augustus, and many others. On one side of this dividing line sat the blessed who had lived on earth under the Old Law, and who had believed that Christ would come; while on the other side sat those who had lived under the New Law, after Christ's coming. In the lower ranks of both divisions were the little children, who had died ere they were grown, yet by God's grace came to this blessed state.

Then again St. Bernard bade Dante gaze on Mary, for the brightness of her face could the best prepare him to look on Christ. So once more he gazed in rapture upon that fairest one, and saw before her the Archangel Gabriel, who had once brought God's message to her. Gabriel hovered there, burning with love and gladness, and spread his wings, singing the *Hail Mary*; and all the saints echoed the song with deepest joy.

Then Bernard, fixing his gaze on Mary, prayed:

'O Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son, lowly and yet uplifted above all, thou who didst so ennoble human nature—here to us thou art a torch of love, and below, to mortals, thou art a living fount of hope! In thee are tenderness and pity and great courtesy; this man who, from the lowest place of the universe up to here, has seen all the lives of the spirits, implores thee for sufficient power to lift his eyes to the Final Good. Do thou scatter with thy prayers all clouds of his mortality, so that he may see the Joy Supreme.



For him I offer all my prayers; and see, the saints pray with me, and among them Beatrice!’

Dante had seen the eyes of Mary fixed on Bernard as he prayed, but now she lifted them upward to the Eternal Light, as if in supplication. And then at last Bernard signed to him that he also should look on high, towards the Light.

What Dante then saw he could not well remember; for afterwards, when he came to write down his vision, he was as one who has dreamed, and on awakening forgets his dream, and only remembers the passion of it—for the vision was almost wholly lost to Dante’s memory, and yet the sweetness of it ever remained within his heart.

All Light he saw, and all the universe bound in one whole by the Divine Love; and he seemed to see three circles—Three in One and One in Three—a Light that cannot be expressed, not understood by any but Itself. And as he sought to gaze yet deeper into that Perfectness, the vision ceased—but his mind was illumined wholly, and his desire and will moved in pure harmony with that Love which moves the sun and the other stars.